

PS3 | Xbox 360 | | GC | Xbox | PC | GBA | PSP | DS | Arcade | Retro

HIGHLIGHTS
UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007 [PC]
COMPANY OF HEROES [PC]
ALONE IN THE DARK [MULTI]
JOINT TASK FORCE [PC]
BROKEN SWORD [MULTI]
CALL OF DUTY 3 [MULTI]
THE DARKNESS [MULTI]
JUST CAUSE [360]
RED STEEL [Wii]

INTERVIEW
TRIP HAWKINS
On sex-change rumours, EA, 3DO and more

PREVIEWED
PRO EVO 6
The best ever football game goes hi def

180 PAGES OF GUN-TOTING MAYHEM

EXCLUSIVE FIRST PLAY
GEARS OF WAR
Unprecedented access to Microsoft's next-gen hope



REPORT
THIS IS WAITING
The industry reacts to Sony's shock delay

HANDS ON
RAINBOW SIX VEGAS
Get the lowdown on Ubisoft's neon-lit sequel


eMag



Enthusiasm. It's an amazing feeling. With the summer of sorrow behind us, we're one step closer to the greatest month on the 2006 calendar: November. As a result, it's with energised joy that my normally in-check patience has developed a few holes, holes that can only be plugged with the release of *Rainbow Six Vegas*, *Gears Of War*, *Forza Motorsport 2*, *F.E.A.R.* and other mammoth titles. November really is going to be a sensational – and expensive – month, regardless of Sony jipping the European community yet again with news of the PS3 delay. Still, I guess we're used to that by now.

Envy. That's not such a wonderful feeling. Now, I don't consider myself to be envious by nature, but having read what my writers experienced on the *Gears Of War* (p34) and *Rainbow Six Vegas* (p56) hands-on outings (the *Rainbow* trip was actually in Vegas), I have to say, I was ready to unleash a deadly sin or two. Both games stunned me at E3, and having read how the two are developing, it's looking like the hype, for once, is fully justified.

Excitement. The feeling I experience in the build-up to every new console launch, and having had hands-on Wii time at Nintendo of Europe's press conference last month, my initial scepticism has shifted to great anticipation. Sadly the Wii won't now hit until 8 December, but at least that'll give me more time with *Gears Of War* and co.

Enjoy the issue…

Paul Morgan

Paul Morgan
Editor

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–BOSS–

CAFE

PRESS 2UP START



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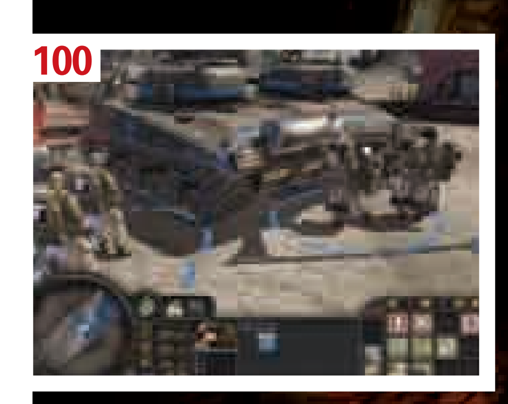
REGULARS

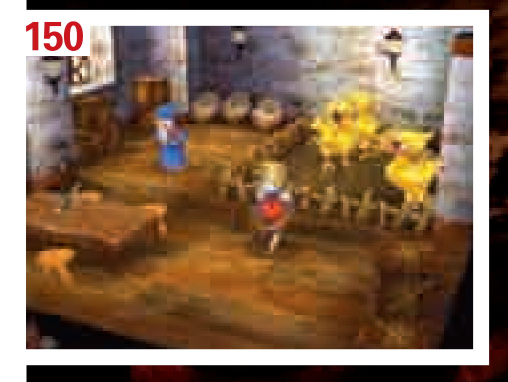
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Gears Of War
Microsoft prepares to usher in a new dawn of next-gen gaming

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> "AS THE ONLY **'CONVENTIONAL' CONSOLE** IN THE MARKET, **360 CAN REALLY CAPITALISE"**
> *NEIL LONG, DEPUTY EDITOR MCV*



Will gamers be able to resist importing a US machine?

THIS IS WAITING

Europe aghast as Sony announces four-month PS3 delay

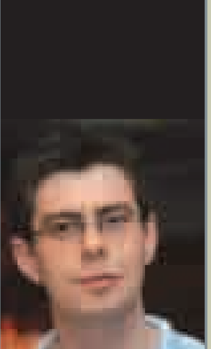
We should be used to it. History tells us that the PAL territories have traditionally been left in the cold when it comes to console launches, availability of software, and prices, but that hasn't stopped Sony's announcement piercing many gamers' hearts this month. Yes, on 6 September 2006, Ken Kutaragi announced that PlayStation3 will be delayed in Europe and all PAL territories until March 2007. The US and Japanese launches will not be affected.

The news comes a shock, but not an entirely unexpected one. Sony's official line blames, "the delay in the mass-production schedule of the blue laser diode within the Sony Group, thus affecting the timely procurement of key components to be utilised in the PlayStation3." Rumours surrounding this matter had been circling for a few weeks prior to the announcement; it was reported on 31 September that Sony had ceased distribution of this vital Blu-ray component to companies manufacturing standalone players, so they could all be used in the PS3. As it turns out, the situation was even worse than the industry had been led to believe resulting in a mammoth announcement that could feasibly turn the entire next-gen battle on its head.

So what impact will this delay have on Sony's position at the top of the console tree? How will Microsoft and Nintendo react? Why, once again, is it the PAL territories that suffer? Ray Maguire, managing director of SCEUK, has already expressed concern, stating: "We are extremely disappointed at news of this delay. We can truly empathise with everyone who was looking forward to PS3's imminent release, we will however be working tirelessly to ensure that the March 2007 launch is the biggest and best in the company's history." This will be scant consolation for those eager to procure their PS3 before Christmas, giving Microsoft and Nintendo a clear run at the top spot in Europe, a huge and welcomed coup for both firms, undoubtedly. Microsoft has gone on record questioning Sony's original commitment to a worldwide launch with UK chief Neil Thompson arguing: "We know how challenging it is to pull off a global launch, so it's not surprising that Sony has backed away from their previously announced launch plan due to the unproven technology they are trying to pack into their console". A damning indictment indeed.

The official line from Nintendo? "We don't comment on other companies' plans or announcements". Admirable, if slightly frustrating, as you can only imagine how well the news has been received at Nintendo HQ. For the current third-placed company in the home console market, having Christmas 2006 in Europe change from a three to a two-horse race must be an immense boost. Given the Wii's relatively low price point in comparison to 360, one would have to assume it's going to do rather well this festive season, especially given the recent glowing publisher feedback discussed in issue 48. Tim Ellis, head of HMV's videogame department, sees the news as "a major opportunity to Microsoft to consolidate Xbox's position in the market, while Nintendo have a great chance to launch and firmly establish Wii". Anyone in their right mind would have to agree.

SO WHAT OF the publishers? Many have been reluctant to comment fearing Sony's wrath should they step out of line, and understandably so, but Eidos' head of marketing for Europe, Dave Clark, has been more outspoken than most. "Clearly, it will be a disappointment for everyone (retailers, customers and publishers alike) across Europe. Expectations surrounding a March release will be even greater," he explains. "For Microsoft, it will be the second Christmas without the PS3, which they will surely exploit to the max. For Nintendo, it is one less



■ Ladies and gentlemen, Mr Neil Long, dep ed of highly respected industry magazine *MCV*.



■ The Cell chip, which promises to change the world forever. And pump out some mean HDR lighting.



■ Is there anything more exciting on this earth than Blu-ray? Yes. Yes there is.

INDUSTRY OPINION

WE STOPPED FOR A QUICK CHAT WITH NEIL LONG, DEPUTY EDITOR OF INDUSTRY INSIDER JOURNAL MCV

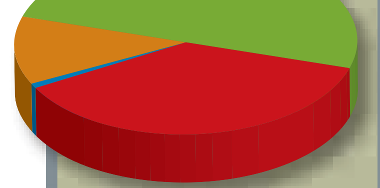
games™: What are your thoughts concerning the news that the PlayStation3 will be delayed until March in Europe?
Neil Long: The consensus from the retailers we've been speaking to is that it's no great surprise. And if anything, there's a sense of relief about it all as the pre-Christmas rush is bad enough with so many game releases to deal with as well as the rush to get hardware out there. Moving it to next year gives everyone in the industry more time to plan the launch out properly, but of course it means that this Christmas many consumers will either wait or just take the plunge and get a 360 or Wii.

g™: What effect do you think this will have on Microsoft, and the launch of Nintendo's Wii?
NL: It's difficult to say – the type of gamer that'll be pre-ordering and buying a PS3 at launch will most likely have a 360 already, and might buy a Wii too. The real impact is in terms of voice share and public perception. We all know how much hype surrounds the launch of a new machine, and now Wii's the only one still happening, Nintendo will claim a lot of coverage. As the only 'conventional' console in the market, 360 can really capitalise.

g™: Does this spell trouble for Sony's position at the top of the tree?
NL: I don't think anyone's writing Sony off yet because of this – it's been the market leader for years, PlayStation2 is still going pretty strong and PlayStation3 will sell out at launch whatever happens. I don't think we'll be able to assess it properly until at least next Christmas.

WILL YOU IMPORT AN AMERICAN PS3?

- 1% Yes
- 12% I'll wait until March
- 50% I'm going to go 'Wii60'
- 37% I was never going to bother anyway



BY THE NUMBERS

- PlayStation units shipped
  102 MILLION
- PlayStation2 units shipped
  106.23 MILLION
- PlayStation Portable units shipped
  20.02 MILLION
- PlayStation3 units available for launch worldwide
  500,000
- Estimated PS3s available by Christmas 2006 in the US
  1.2 MILLION
- Promised PS3s by end of fiscal year 2007
  6 MILLION
- Total Xbox 360s sold so far
  5 MILLION APPROX



It won't be a three-horse race this Christmas after all.





No longer a PS3 exclusive – was it ever?

competitor to worry about. For both companies, it will only be seen as great news. It certainly places Sony under greater pressure. However, it cannot be denied that Sony has a great track record in launching new consoles. 2007 is going to be an interesting year."

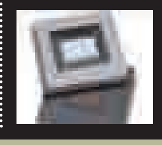
Accompanying Clark's wise words are the musings of an industry PR insider who has requested to remain nameless but gives an insight into both the mind of the consumer and the publisher alike, "It's not made a single difference to my personal gaming life. I had no plans to buy one this side of Easter anyway, so I couldn't care a jot", he tells us. "Professionally, it means hell for the magazines, especially those recently launched to look exclusively at the PS3, and demands an instant rethink of all PS2-based coverage strategy. I won't pretend to understand how it will affect Microsoft or Nintendo, though they are probably laughing heartily in their underground bunkers right now, while diving into their huge vats of money *Duck Tales*-style, calling each other up and taking off all their clothes. What's surprising is that [Sony has] chosen to prioritise the US market over the European market. Considering quite how bad the PR situation is in the States compared to how it is in Europe, and the lead 360 has in the States compared to in Europe, I would have thought that the battle would have been fought here."

The development community would appear to be in agreement. Alex Hutchinson, senior designer at Maxis, can see the gaming status quo slowly shifting, "just before the Dreamcast launched, Sony did an amazing job at making people choose to wait for the PS2", he told us, "but I think the days of blind faith in Sony are quickly passing. If Microsoft can push very hard in the lead up to December they could grab a lot of people who were originally planning to wait for a PS3 but really want a new console for the holidays." However, it's Hutchinson's next point that proves most salient as he urges the industry to keep a calm head and look at the situation in perspective. "The reports of Sony's untimely demise are greatly exaggerated," he is quick to maintain, "I don't think there's anything that can knock Sony down from the top of the heap yet. Microsoft doesn't have a hope of selling in Japan, and the Wii may well be the most exciting hardware on the planet, but it will be very few people's primary games system."

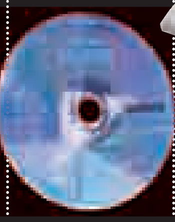
In an industry built on hype and hyperbole, it's crucial that we remain levelheaded. PS3 will still launch in the US and Japan, albeit in diminished numbers – 400,000 in the US and a meagre 100,000 units for Japan – on 17 November 2006. Sony is still promising shipment of 6 million units before the end of the fiscal year 2007, and there can be absolutely no doubt that PlayStation is still a phenomenally strong brand with consumers. The news is a blow to Sony, but more importantly, a massive boost for Microsoft and Nintendo. While it may seem a slightly bizarre notion to suggest that this news is actually good for the consumer, by strengthening the likelihood of a proper three-horse race this gen, the real winners are the gamers. Price wars, strong exclusive content, commitment to improving online services will all come as a result of Sony's folly. Don't write the beast off just yet; it may be wounded, but it's far from dead.

PLAYSTATION3 ANNOUNCEMENTS TIMELINE

MAR 2000
Sony announces the Cell chip – the driving force behind its next generation of products.

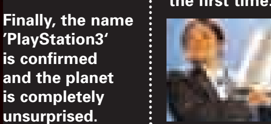


JAN 2002



A successor to PS2 is confirmed to have been in development for the last two years, but Sony refuses to confirm its name.

FEB 2002
Blu-ray is revealed to the world.



NOV 2002
Finally, the name 'PlayStation3' is confirmed and the planet is completely unsurprised.

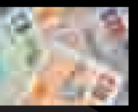
MAY 2005
No word for two and a half years until E3 2005 where Ken Kutaragi reveals PlayStation3 for the first time.



MAR 2006
PS3's first proper delay. The ambitious spring 2005 release date is pushed back to November.



MAY 2006



After months of waiting, Kutaragi finally announces the machine's price: a staggering £425 for the 'premium' package.

SEPT 2006
Disaster strikes, as a component shortage results in a four-month delay in the PAL territories.



FALSE STARTS

This is hardly the first time a console launch has not gone smoothly. As recently as last year, Microsoft's much-publicised 360 debacle could never be described as 'going without a hitch', seeing massive stock shortages and eBay profiteers ruining many a family's Christmas. Sony itself is no stranger to false promises. The PS2 also suffered manufacturing delays and a weak selection of launch games, meaning many were not able to find one on shop shelves for many months after its initial release.

As for the PAL market, as much as a four-month wait is a veritable kick in the teeth, it's far from the worst we've had to suffer. In the UK, Nintendo 64 was released a full nine months after the Japanese launch, while the SNES arrived a phenomenal 17 months after it had debuted in the East. We're still the territory that's left out in the cold, but it used to be much worse.

■ Koei's blistering *Fatal Inertia* won't be arriving until March at the earliest

■ Ninja Theory's distinctly un-sexist *Heavenly Sword*. It's *empowering* for females to be scantily clad, or so we're led to believe.

■ We'd wait forever for *MGS4*. But that doesn't mean we're happy about it.

FROM THE FORUM

HOW DO OUR VALUED FORUM USERS FEEL ABOUT THE DELAY?

AC-AA-1806

In all honesty, I'm not that bothered by the fact that Sony is delaying releasing the PS3 until next year, I wasn't going to get one for a long while yet anyway. What does annoy me though, and this is a general thing throughout the industry it seems, is that Europe – or should I say the PAL Territories as they cover Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Australasia – aren't taken seriously enough, we always lose out in the long run.

CHINZON

I'm sure anyone who was willing to fork out for one at launch will be willing to import. I suspect Sony had the shambolic launch of 360 in mind when it made this decision.

SIMONSTA

The Wii is looking more appealing by the day. I think the current 'innovative gaming' trend will carry on into the home console market and people will go for the easily accessible, and cheaper console.

CATDONKEY

I am surprised and disappointed. I have secretly harboured a desire for PS3 to be everything it's cracked up to be and more. I still hope that it proves to be an awesome machine, but I will definitely be getting a Nintendo Wii in my stocking from Santa this year and wringing the last drops of capability from my PS2. Why does all the crap have to happen to Europe?

JAMES

Congratulations, Sony, you've brought last decade's PAL versus NTSC importing clash into the new millennium and managed to infuriate a whole new generation of gamers in the process.

THE INQUISITOR

It is an unfortunate situation for Sony, but despite this setback, I don't by any means think that this will jeopardise its hold on the market, PS2 will see to that. It will lose out though, and depending on your views, this could be a good thing. With 360 going from strength to strength, and with the promise of a brighter future with Nintendo Wii, the playing field could be levelled allowing both companies a chance to win the 'next-gen war', which would make the gaming scene a lot more interesting.

DATA STREAM

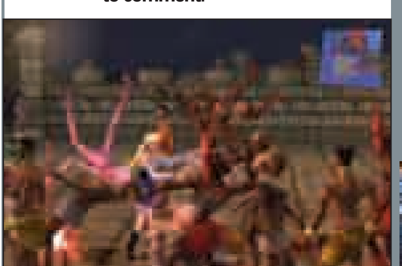
DOWNLOADING... 20%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HAND OF TODD

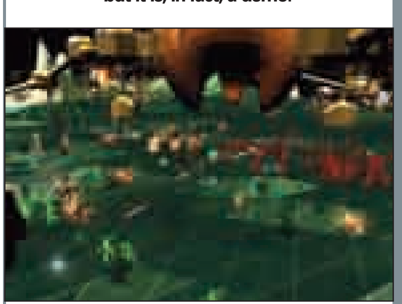
Comic book legend Todd McFarlane may be moving to videogames full-time. With roles in several games under his belt, he'll become lead artist at new US development studio, Green Monster Games. Curt Shilling, a baseball player and MMO fan, will be company president while fantasy writer RA Salvatore will be creative director. The talent's unquestionable, but the company will also operate under a radical new business model that gives the creative talent a half share of the profits. The publishing community has yet to comment.

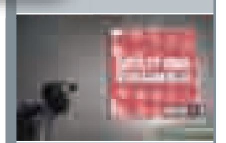




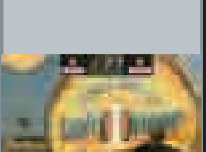
PIRATE PRANKS

Darwinia developer Introversion may be able to curb growing concern over piracy. Wary of the effect a leaked copy of any game could have on sales, Introversion has gone guerrilla, taking the war to the peer-to-peer networks themselves. Speaking to gamesindustry.biz, sales and marketing director Tom Arundel said, "You can't stop peer-to-peer file sharing, so the best route to combat it is to subvert it. We will release a version of our game that looks like it's been hacked at the same time as a pirated version gets out. Our version looks like the real game, but it is, in fact, a demo."





In between all the sneaking, news about your favourite band's latest record could come in handy.



These guys could certainly do with a few of those super-sized Big Mac meals.

Nestle's Butterfinger, the peanutty candy bar, co-sponsored Activision's *Tony Hawk's Underground.*



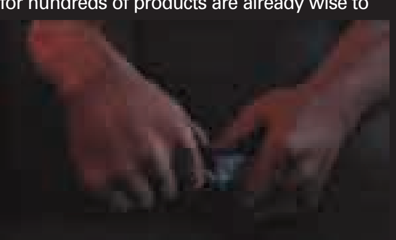
Is all this gaming making you a bit peckish?

SPLINTER

THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY MAKES AN INE

Special Forces operative Sam Fisher creeps aboard his target's liner. Hugging the wall, he melts into the shadows and prepares to dirk an unwary henchman. But the garlic stench of his Chicken Kiev breath becomes pervasive and the guard downwind must have smelled it by now. The swim through icy waters has left him with a chill too – he can already feel his sinuses congesting. He can't continue his mission in this state. Luckily, Fisher always carries a packet of Wrigley's Airwaves. The great-tasting gum that clears your nose and freshens your breath is a vital part of Fisher's kit and he goes nowhere without it.

Advertising in games isn't a new concept – you may well have chuckled at the brazen product placement in the opening scene of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory.* Ad departments for hundreds of products are already wise to

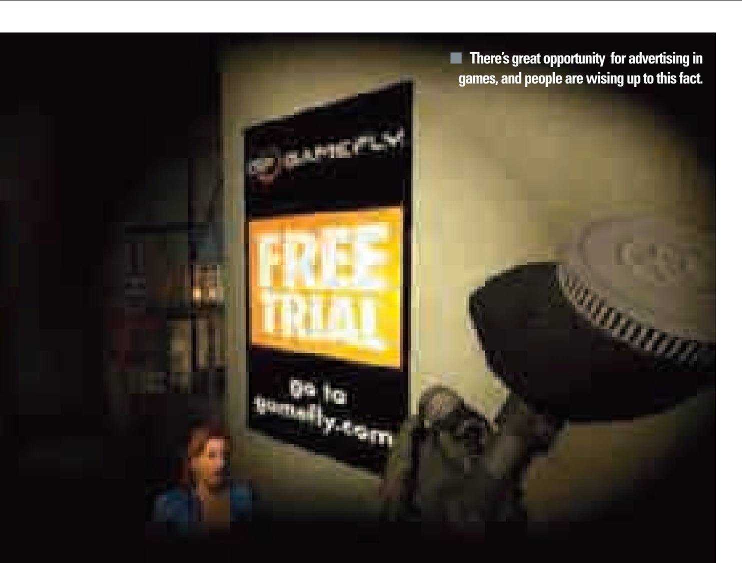


the fact that traditional media audiences they target their wares at are becoming fractured and the mass market no longer exists. Videogames have now become recognised for their huge advertising opportunity. 2D media have only limited potential and 3D advertising in games more readily engages a susceptible demographic of young players with significant spending power. An in-game character could be wearing Gaff's latest threads, a bling-bling Psycho watch and hi-tech Nookiea mobile phone logos, and all in their 3D viewable glory. Unsurprisingly, EA has bought into this dynamic, in-game advertising with its latest title *Battlefield 2142* incorporating contextually relevant adverts. This is the first in a portfolio of EA titles containing dynamic ads in a deal struck with ad agency IGA worldwide.

But before you remonstrate the commercialisation of your favourite pastime, consider the benefits to the gamer. Currently, games are leaning toward realism more than ever before and using in-game brands that exist in real life can only lend itself to this trend. The money advertising brings to industry can benefit gamers too, lowering the cost of games and possibly extending content.

Obviously, our major concern is that advertising could overwhelm games and





There's great opportunity for advertising in games, and people are wising up to this fact.

SELL?

VITABLE MOVE ON VIDEOGAMES

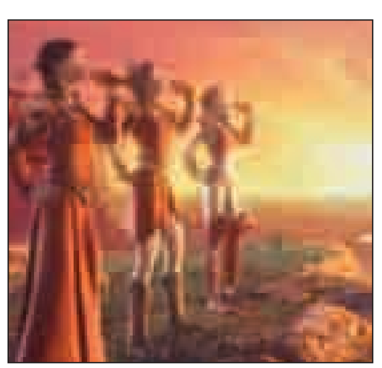
even wield some control over the industry if left unchecked, but in a recent article for Gamesindustry.biz, Jonathan Epstein, CEO of in-game ad firm Double Fusion, provides some reassurance. "Ease of integration is paramount […] to ensure advertising never interferes with the gaming experience," he postured. Coming from an ad firm, that's not entirely comforting to hear, but considering a reasonable balance has been achieved in film and cinema, we're sure it's possible for advertising to exist happily alongside games.



NOT ANOTHER...

WOW COKE ADVERT

WHAT HAS SONY DONE WRONG?



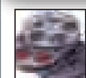
It makes no apologies for itself, and the shamelessness of the *WOW* Coke ad actually makes for entertaining viewing.

Coca-Cola's foray into advertising its famous beverage in China initially involved stringing a series of Chinese words into a phrase that, phonetically at least, sounded like 'Coca-Cola' but whose literal translation was 'bite the wax tadpole'. Sounds like an appropriate name for a thirst-quenching soft drink, does it not? And its latest adverts take a similarly ham-fisted approach. A trio of cute Asian women drinking coke while playing games may not be such an outrageous premise for an advert, especially in China where girl gaming isn't the taboo it is in the West. But the flagrant cash-in on the popularity of *World Of Warcraft*, the biggest MMORPG ever, does raise our incredulous European eyebrows. The idea of an Orc, a Taurean and a Troll leaping out of a laptop to capture a gaggle of teens and their Coke is as subtle as a sledgehammer to the chops, but they obviously think the campaign has legs as this is the second *WOW* Coke ad. Given that the first saw the same girls defeating an Orc for its 'treasure' – a chest freezer of coke complete with golden aura – it makes the second ad sublime by comparison. You won't see these ads broadcast in the UK, not least of all because they reach a much broader demographic in the East and they just won't wash over here. It's a shame as they're quite entertaining – but there's always YouTube.

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOADING... 40%

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



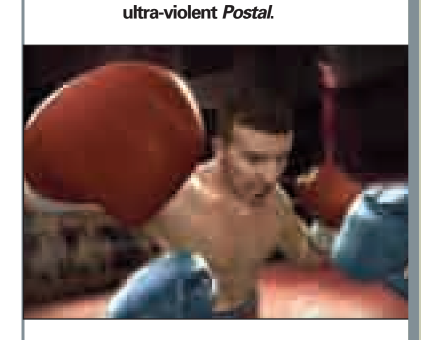
TRUE LIES?

One-time king of the world James Cameron may enter the world of MMOs. At the Austin Game Conference, producer Jon Landau revealed that Cameron has joined the advisory board for MMO network, Multiverse. "It turns out that films and MMOs aren't that different," explained Landau. "We're beyond the notion of game-as-brand-extending-afterthought. Let the virtual world – the vibrant, living world that people inhabit – let that influence the movie. Let it feed back into the process and provide unparalleled riches and depth to what we're doing."

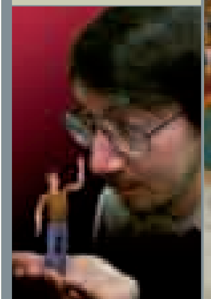


IT'S A KNOCKOUT

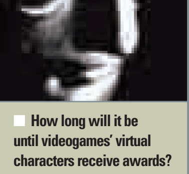
Many would love to get in the ring with Uwe Boll, director of such cinematic monstrosities as *Alone In The Dark*. Throwing down the gauntlet a few months ago, Boll challenged his critics to a full-on fight in front of a paying crowd; little did they know that the director was once an amateur boxer. The footage of the first fight confirms that he knew exactly what he was doing when he challenged naysayers to a scrap. The clip's available on YouTube with four more fights scheduled. Footage from each bout will feature in Boll's forthcoming take on the ultra-violent *Postal*.



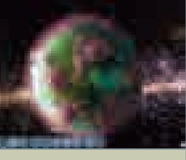




Will Wright's conceptual bent on videogaming has lead to a string of successful titles.



How long will it be until videogames' virtual characters receive awards?



Spore is the latest title in development from Maxis to simulate the complete history and generation of life.

OVERDUE APPRECIATION

VIDEOGAMES RECEIVE LONG-OVERDUE RECOGNITION AS AN ART FORM

The exponential rise of the videogame market in the last 30 years, from a niche industry to a global phenomenon on a par with mainstream entertainment, has long been considered more of a juvenile pastime than an artistic outlet. Fierce competition and rapid turnover however, have driven a move toward ever-increasing sophistication in game concepts and technologies. Artistically, the videogame industry has begun to converge with the well established media of film and television, and this has finally been acknowledged by some of the bigwigs in the entertainment industry.

"People are starting to wake up to the importance of videogames, culturally, artistically and economically," said Ubisoft MD Rob Cooper at the BAFTA headquarters in London in a promotional event for BAFTA's new videogames awards ceremony. "It's fitting that our success is now recognised by such an esteemed British institution as BAFTA."

Rob Cooper's speech was mirrored by ELSPA boss and BAFTA games committee chairman, Paul Jackson, "Games now make up a huge part of entertainment and spending across all age groups. The creative lines have blurred, and the synergies between the industries of game, film and television are now many."

Certainly games have moved a long way past the conceptual and graphical simplicity of the Eighties arcade, and genre-defying games like *The Sims* series are a product of the new millennia of games. Its creator, Will Wright, the same man behind the highly anticipated and groundbreaking *Spore*, is one of many far-sighted icons of the creative side of the videogaming industry. Speaking at the same promotional event, Wright gave a typically profound and informative speech on the development and history of the industry.

"Early games were technically very primitive and they relied a lot on imagination. As games have advanced, it's tipping the balance so they're much more graphically rich and there's a lot less imagination. I think storytelling has gone a similar path in some ways.

The core of game design is more about the psychology of the player. The computer in front of them is really just a tool to spark the imagination. These worlds, these characters, these events are really happening in the player's imagination and the computer's really just a tool or compiler for that mental world."

The new videogames BAFTA awards ceremony will take place in London on 5 October 2006.

"THE **CORE OF GAME DESIGN** IS MORE ABOUT THE **PSYCHOLOGY OF THE PLAYER**"

GAMES ROOM 101

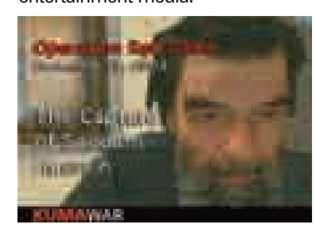
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 49: POLITICAL FOOTBALLS

Using the medium of videogames for the purposes of political propaganda is a relatively new concept, but when taken in the context of the age of the industry, it's fairly old news. The latest group to seize upon this idea is an Iranian student union called the Union of Islamic Student Societies. Its unnamed game retaliates against *Assault On Iran* by American company Kuma.

It's sad to see games conceived out of twisted political machinations, especially when production qualities often fall by the wayside in an effort to make a statement. However, this only serves to highlight the general acknowledgement of the growing overlap in the boundaries of games of other popular entertainment media.



NINTENDO Wii LAUNCH NEWS

PRICE AND RELEASE DATE ANNOUNCED FOR Wii

Here's the date, mark it down and keep it safe because the second piece of the next-gen puzzle has finally slipped into place. Nintendo has announced that Wii will launch in Europe on 8 December 2006 with a price-point of £179 – more expensive than rumour had suggested. The basic package will include the console, a Wiimote, a nunchaku and a copy of *Wii Sports*. *The Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess* will be available at launch along with a further 15-20 games, including *Red Steel*, *Need For Speed: Carbon*, *Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam* and *Super Monkey Ball: Banana Blitz*. Most games will retail between £34 and £39.

15 Virtual Console titles will be available immediately with a further ten to be added each month from the Nintendo and Sega back catalogues. The only apparent downside is that Wii will be region locked, contradicting advance word that it would be region free, thereby allowing enterprising consumers to capitalise on the US and Japanese markets' lower price points.



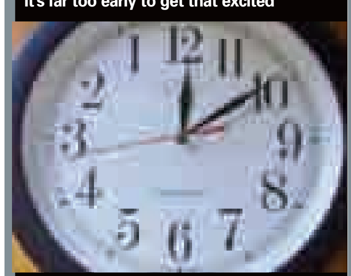
Yours on 8 December for £179.



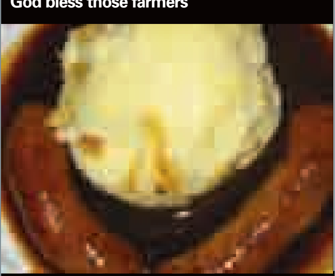
WINTER ANTICIPATION



No.5 CHRISTMAS
It's far too early to get that excited



No.4 DAYLIGHT SAVINGS
God bless those farmers



No.3 HOT DINNERS
Yay. No more rabbit food



No.2 NINTENDO Wii
There's only one thing better a Wii…

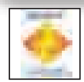


No.1 ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS
…and that's the new games to play on it

DATA STREAM

DOWNLOADING... COMPLETE

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



LONG-TERM INVESTMENT

News of a delayed launch has hit European Sony fans hard, but they can take some heart in the words of SOE Europe president Kaz Hirai. It seems that when it does arrive, PS3 is designed with the long haul in mind. "We look at our products having a ten-year life cycle, which we've proved with PlayStation," Hirai said. "Therefore, PlayStation3 is going to be a console that will be with you again for ten years." Market forces can put an end to such common sense. What will they say if the going gets tough?

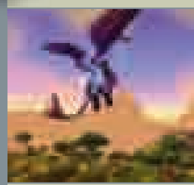




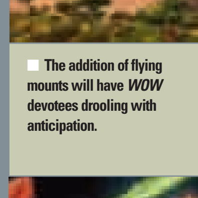
VIRTUAL POLITICS

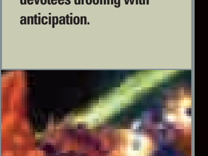
The MMO took another step along the path to acceptance when former Virginia governor, Mark Warner, cleared space in his diary to make a stop in *Second Life*. A contender for leadership of the Democrats in the next US presidential election, Warner's avatar flew into the meeting and stayed for a brief, rigidly structured interview with *Second Life*'s resident journalist Wagner James Au where topics such as abortion and Iraq were discussed. This looks like a positive indication that the wider world is taking note of the importance of the MMO as a discursive platform.

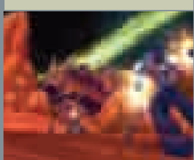




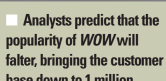
The addition of flying mounts will have *WOW* devotees drooling with anticipation.

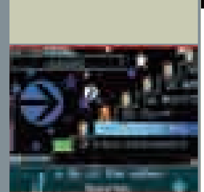






Analysts predict that the popularity of *WOW* will falter, bringing the customer base down to 1 million.





A typically fun menu screen from the Japanese Play-Yan.



Promotional material for the MP3 player from the Leipzig Game Convention.

BRAVE NEW WORLD

WORLD OF WARCRAFT EXPANDS, BUT AT WHAT COST?

When it comes to MMOs, the column inches of the mainstream media are normally devoted to tales of ruined families and unbalanced children. The enormous success of Blizzard's *World Of Warcraft*, however, may be starting to change all that.

The New York Times has run several articles on the phenomenon, claiming that only *Pac-Man* comes close to *WOW* in terms of global impact and that its huge market share could have a detrimental effect on the online market. Chris Kramer of SOE, commented: "It's like being in the early Nineties and putting a fighting game up against *Street Fighter* or *Mortal Kombat*; it's just not going to happen."

With 4 million subscribers, $700 million annually in revenue, and a steadily tightening grip on new markets such as China, *WOW* is clearly still on the rise, and the team at Blizzard is working hard to ensure that its winning streak doesn't end just yet.

The Burning Crusade is the first in a proposed series of expansion packs for *WOW*, the success of which will go some way to guaranteeing a long-term future for the franchise. Major additions will be the Outlands, a whole new section beyond the dark portal, and the introduction of flying mounts, which will allow a new perspective on this stunningly realised universe.

The level cap will be increased to 70 and two new races will be introduced: the Blood Elves, a magic-addicted race aligned with the Horde, and the Draenei, an alien race that crashed on Azeroth when their intergalactic transport was sabotaged by the Blood Elves.

NINTENDO SOUNDS OFF

MP3 PLAYER COMING TO DS AND GBA

Following moderate success in Japan, Nintendo's Play-Yan media player is finally making its way to European shores. Although the MP3 player will almost certainly be sold under a different name, it is essentially the same device and allows both MP3s and M-PEG 4 movie files to be played from an SD card through a DS, DS LITE, GBA SP or Game Boy Micro.

The original Japanese Play-Yan, released in early 2005, could also download 12 mini-games from Nintendo's website that were small enough to fit in the excess space of an SD Card even when full of music and movie data. The games were mere distractions but were definitely welcome extras to the package. Nintendo has yet to confirm if the games will make it to the European model or even if an SD card will be bundled with the player. Price and release date are also unconfirmed at the time of writing, but some online retailers have currently earmarked the system for an October release with a 30-Euro price tag.



The shock decision to locally release the Play-Yan nearly two years after its release in Japan can be read as yet another aggressive response to PSP's multimedia capabilities, but we prefer to see it as a move to dampen the effect of Nintendo DS's growing homebrew scene where MP3 and movie players have been available for some time. One thing is clear though: we now have one more excellent reason to pick up a DS.


eMag



THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

PATCHING UP OLD WOUNDS



Saints Row. It's a funny old game. After months of convincing myself that I was going to hate this title's wholesale 'borrowing' of *Grand Theft Auto*'s every organ, I actually came to play the thing, and really rather enjoyed it. (I still am, in fact.) Apart from one thing, that is. One infuriating, disappointing and utterly unacceptable thing: the Online mode. It would appear that it's become entirely acceptable for firms to release software with terrible net code, and simply appear on the net a few days later promising a patch to fix lag, latency, cheaters, cancer and the crisis in Iraq.

All those suckers that paid over the odds are then left with half a game until the development team get off their collective arses and fix the problems that should have never existed in the first place. It's a problem that's been rife in the PC gaming world for years, and many predicted it that would also plague the next-generation consoles – and they were right, the buggers. I want to play 'Big Ass Chains', dammit, and I want to enjoy it. The most galling thing is that you can tell how much fun it would be if only the bloody thing worked.

So now, here I sit waiting for the next shooter that can 'do a *Halo 2*' and actually get it right the first time round. *Call Of Duty 2*? Broken for months. *Perfect Dark Zero*? Hate it. Please don't tell me I have to wait for the Chief's next appearance before I can actually play some deathmatch straight out of the box.

Oh well, back to lagging around the 'Row it is then. I'll see you there. For about a second, before you disappear through the floor.

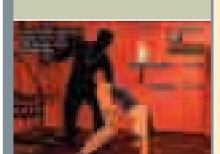
Mr X isn't always this angry. He just really wants to be a gangster.



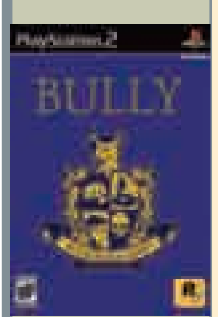
FROM THE FRONT

BIG INVESTOR INTERESTED IN TAKETWO / FORMATION OF LARGE UK-BASED QA FIRM / nDREAMS: NEW DEVELOPER, NEW FOCUS





Hot Coffee got TakeTwo into hot water, but that didn't exactly hurt profits.



Will Icahn push for more or less controversial games?

BILLIONAIRE INVESTS IN TAKETWO

RADICAL CHANGES AHEAD FOR ROCKSTAR'S PARENT COMPANY?

Stock prices of New York-based TakeTwo Interactive rose from an estimated $10.82 to $11.56 in August when news spread that billionaire investor Carl Icahn had bought 800,000 shares in the company.

Though the rise in stock price appears to be great news for the publisher that owns Britain's own Rockstar Games, the news is actually shrouded in uncertainty thanks to Icahn's unusual reputation. The investor currently ranks 24th in *Forbes* magazine's 400 richest Americans and is well known for buying shares in firms before lobbying for changes that could positively affect the value of the company.

With TakeTwo's recent rocky history – legal trouble, external investigations and a Grand Jury subpoena – it's clear that the company needs to undergo major changes if it is to avoid further controversy. Though Icahn's plans are as yet unknown, we're sure that the upper management at TakeTwo will be very nervous at the prospect of the 'billionaire activist' putting



the pressure on the firm to make any radical, internal changes.

Whatever changes are made at the top, however, **games**™ would be very surprised if they have any affect on TakeTwo's end products. The company's catalogue of IP, including *GTA*, *Canis Canem Edit* (formally *Bully*) and *Manhunt*, has been extraordinarily lucrative for the firm and we're sure that it'll continue to output similarly controversial material as long it brings in the big bucks.

TESTING TIMES

EX-LIONHEAD BOSS FORMS QA COMPANY

As the scope of games increases, it's inevitable that the need for professional beta testers will rise. With every generational leap in technology, the number of variables to consider increases, and small, internal testing teams will struggle to keep up with the workload. Larger, specialist QA firms are bound to become the norm over the next decade, and this month such a company has been formed in the UK. Founded by ex-Lionhead and Bullfrog testing manager Andy Robson, Testology will specialise in both on and off-site testing, gameplay advice, bug testing and proof reading.

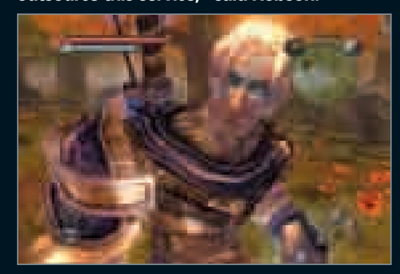
The industry veteran has worked on over 30 videogames, including *Black & White*, *Theme Park*, *The Movies* and *Fable*; a track record that proves Robson is well placed to take videogame testing to the next level and bring the practice in line with the standards of the rest of the industry as it evolves.

"The industry has really changed over the past 12 years, and it makes sound economic sense for developers and publishers to outsource this service," said Robson.

The industry has changed a lot over the last 12 years.



Robson has experience with UK-based developers such as Lionhead Studios.



With titles like *Fable* under his belt, we'd trust Andy to QA our game.


eMag

THE DREAM WEAVER

EX-EIDOS BOSS FORMS NEW DEVELOPER

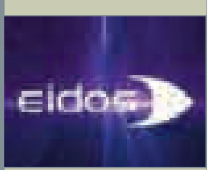
Having only recently become the design director of Eidos after SCi's acquisition of the publisher earlier this year, Patrick O'Luanaigh has left to start a new independent developer. O'Luanaigh announced the start up of his new company, nDreams, at the conclusion of a recent speech at the GCDC in Leipzig this August.

No hard facts are known about nDreams, but O'Luanaigh did drop hints during his speech. He focused on improving methods of storytelling in games and said he saw nDreams as an opportunity to put many of the ideas from his speech into practice.

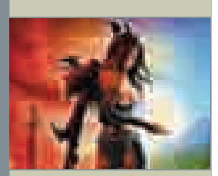
Convincing storytelling has been the Holy Grail of modern videogame development. With strong narratives surfacing in the graphic adventure genre and floundering elsewhere, it's encouraging to see new developers taking positive steps in the field. And with so many British firms biting the bullet in the last five years, it warms our hearts to see smaller dev houses emerging to provide something different to the generic offerings of the big, multinational publishers.



O'Luanaigh oversaw the creative side of *Hitman* and *Tomb Raider* before leaving Eidos.



The UK's largest developer/ publisher, Eidos seems to produce innovators who go on to start other companies.



EA sets its sights on German developer Phenomic.

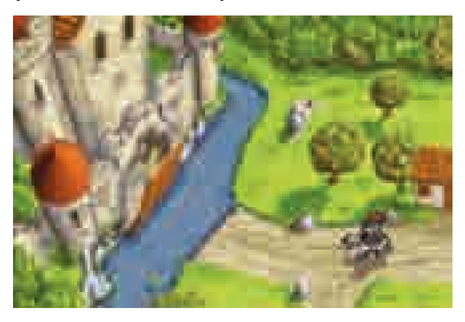
EA WE GO AGAIN

EA ACQUIRES YET ANOTHER STUDIO

In its unstoppable quest to take over the world, EA has bought German RTS developer Phenomic. The creator of *Settlers* and *Spellforce* will continue to work in Germany but under the guiding hand of US publisher EA. It is also known to be working on a new project which will be announced at a later date.

Both parties appear happy with the acquisition, with Phenomic's MD commenting: "We've always been passionate about creating games with a focus on quality, innovation and fun, and EA has the same philosophy for game making".

As long as the next *Settlers* doesn't feature any EA Game Trax then this new partnership should be productive for both companies.



Doors are opening for Phenomic. But what lurks behind them?

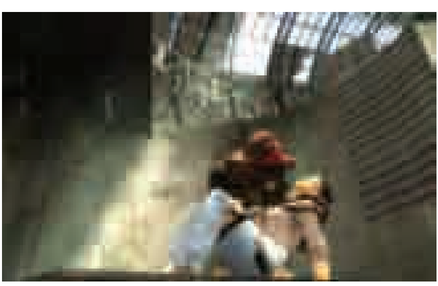

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SHADOW OF THE BEAST

THE COLLAPSE OF THE OLD E3 HAS MADE 2006 THE LEIPZIG GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE'S MOST IMPORTANT YEAR YET. GAMES™ WAS AT GROUND ZERO...

For many years the Leipzig Game Developers Conference has been bubbling under the surface, ploughing its own furrow to become the largest show of its kind in Europe, while the industry remained transfixed by the bright lights of E3. Against such stiff competition there is little more to do than simply carry on regardless, but in the wake of E3's collapse – and as the next major industry event in the calendar – all eyes were on Leipzig 2006. If a positive influence of the Los Angeles mega-show's demise was intended to be the empowerment of other events around the world, then this was Leipzig's chance to prove that no more E3 is no bad thing.

Over four days, a record 183,000 visitors passed through the dazzling steel and glass of Leipzig's bleeding-edge convention centre, the overwhelming majority of whom left happy and vowed to return. Josef Rahmen, CEO of the Leipzig Fair, heralded 2006 as the finest show to date, stating, "Success on this scale is unique ever since Leipzig Fair's new exhibition centre opened ten years ago. GC has clearly demonstrated that it's the European number one, not just among the general public, but also in the media and business sector, making it one of the leading events anywhere in the world."



Valve showed off another Episode Two trailer behind closed doors.



Look at all the happy, smiling children. Gaming fanaticism at its best.



In an attempt to boost the show's cross-generational appeal, the organisers introduced two new elements – GC Family and GC Art – with an emphasis on education and interactivity. The Family area contained a 5,000 square metre 3D board game, while GC Art featured an exhibition on the history of *Pong* and workshops on character design. "GC Family and the new section GC Art have resulted in more visitors from different generations," claims project director Angela Schierholz. "GC has hence met one of its key aims by showing that interactive entertainment and education are relevant for society as a whole."

Whether that lofty target was in fact achieved is open to debate. The Institute of Market Research reported that 17 per cent of visitors were female, though that figure seems generous. The consumer area was awash with people – mostly teenage boys – with pods almost as difficult to get to as those at E3. Bands and DJs played, costumed promotions staff thrust leaflets into every passing hand, and booth babes, much maligned of late, were stationed at the majority of stands. After a long day pounding the sticky floors of the consumer halls, you could almost believe this was E3.



Capcom's *Lost Planet* was announced as an Xbox 360 exclusive.

INEFFICIENCY WAS THE death of E3. Most areas of the industry simply couldn't justify the expense of an event that didn't fulfil its own purpose, and the baffling entrance policy was perhaps the most significant contributing factor. Despite being a trade show, E3 was renowned for offering tickets to anyone with even the most tenuous link to gaming. The result was an overcrowded show where serious journalists had to battle with those there for a day out and a few glamour photos. It was a trade show trying to be a consumer show, and consequently no business got done. Leipzig, however, embraces both the public and the industry, with the good sense to keep the two separate. There were specific days set out for each group, and an entire hall was provided for developers and publishers to exhibit their wares away from the clamour of the masses. One PR, who wished to remain anonymous, commented, "I've done more here in one morning than I could have done in two days at E3." The scale of E3 would always prove problematic, but Leipzig shows that the spectacle can remain as long as it isn't to the detriment of business.

Of the three platform holders, it was Microsoft that made its presence most strongly felt, with both the largest stand and the most informative presentation. The company was buoyant,

"GC HAS DEMONSTRATED THAT IT'S THE **EUROPEAN NUMBER ONE,** NOT JUST AMONG THE GENERAL PUBLIC BUT ALSO **IN THE MEDIA AND BUSINESS SECTOR,** MAKING IT ONE OF THE **LEADING EVENTS IN THE WORLD"**

JOSEF RAHMAN, LEIPZIG GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE CEO

Events like Leipzig give like-minded individuals the chance to stand shoulder to shoulder.

"WE PUT THE **NEXT INTO NEXT GEN"**

DON DAGLOW

SERVING UP A SLICE OF THE NEXT GENERATION

In the opening keynote speech of the conference, Don Daglow, founder of Stormfront Studios, discussed the inevitable hot topic: next-generation technology. Daglow made a subdued rallying cry to the development community and gamers in general to look to themselves if they feel underwhelmed by the next generation so far.

"I read stories saying that next gen isn't next gen yet, the games aren't exciting yet, I don't see anything different yet," Daglow chastised. "We cannot turn to Microsoft or Nintendo or Sony and say, 'What are you going to do about that?' That's like going to our parents and complaining about our scores at university… It's hardware manufacturers who set the table but game designers who prepare and serve the meal."

Suspect dinner-party metaphors aside, Daglow's view was echoed in many other speeches, and set the tone for the conference as a whole. Between the three platforms, developers have an embarrassment of riches, and it's up to them to exploit that.

"THE BEST IS YET TO COME"
STEPHANE LABRUNIE

LISTEN OUT FOR THE SOUND OF MOBILE GAMING

Mobile gaming will always struggle to be heard above the clamour, particularly when that clamour surrounds the next generation, but I-play's Stephane Labrunie instructed the industry not to ignore the market's potential. "It is the definition of a true mass market," claimed Labrunie. "It's not a niche market like console gaming."

Presenting figures that forecast sales of 1.8 billion handsets by the end of 2008, downloads numbering 1.7 billion and a projected gross revenue of up to $5.9 billion, mobile gaming certainly sounded like an accountant's dream, although Labrunie admitted that the market still needs time to grow, citing a lack of awareness among consumers as the primary factor.

"We have customers but definitely not enough," Labrunie claimed. "Some have no more credit on their pre-pay card, some don't have time, some don't know how to download games… If you keep that in mind, it will help us to build a good strategy to perform well in this business."

"WE HAVEN'T YET SCRATCHED THE SURFACE"
GRAHAM HOPPER

IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

While the vast majority of companies were discussing how to make progress in existing markets, Buena Vista Games was setting its sights on world domination. Graham Hopper, senior vice president, declared: "Most game publishers only look at three regions of the world. But if you think about it there's barely 1 billion people in those markets. That means we're leaving 5 billion people out, who I call the 'ungamed billions'."

The countries that he saw as being "barely on the map" in the eyes of the game industry were Russia, India and China; the latter two in particular, with their rapidly expanding economies and technological awareness, would be ideal targets to help expand the marketplace. With so much of the show preoccupied with the next-gen debate and the performance of the platform holders in Europe, Japan and America, it was refreshing to hear a view on the long-term future of the industry.



One of the most imposing stands was that of Activision. We assume the full-on half-pipe with tricky skatists was something to do with a certain *Tony Hawk's Project 8*.

announcing that it had secured exclusive next-gen rights to both the *FIFA* and *Pro Evolution* football franchises for the next 12 months – though the impact of this announcement has been dulled by PS3's delayed launch. Commitment to releasing an HD DVD drive this autumn was reinforced, and plans were stated to launch Xbox 360 in Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. There was also a demonstration of XNA, Microsoft's new home-dev kit, illustrating the simple process required to create a side-scrolling shooter. This revealed little of the software's true potential, but the news that it had been added to the curriculum of universities in Europe, including Nottingham, Hull and Bradford, was seen as a positive sign.

Nintendo glazed over a lack of new information with a healthy spot of brand strengthening, elaborating further on the company's aim to extend the gaming demographic with Wii and DS. The expected announcement of a release date and price point for Wii never came, but two new games were mentioned, *Battalion Wars 2* and *Mario Striker Charge*. The presentation was capped by the announcement of a pink DS Lite – available from 27 October – before yet another run down of the sales figures for DS and its more popular games. All still impressive, but nothing the gaming world doesn't already know.

SONY, HOWEVER, PROVIDED the show's biggest talking point. Not due to any earth-shaking revelations, but rather the complete lack of them. This was before the delayed PS3 release date was announced, and while that makes Sony's silence more understandable, it's still a poor excuse. Sony must have noticed the dramatic change in public opinion regarding PlayStation3, but rather than exploit Leipzig as a great opportunity for damage limitation there was simply silence. Without any playable PlatStation3 code – not even the games that had appeared at E3 months before – it felt like a snub to the festival in favour of the Tokyo Game Show. In light of the delay, it now seems like a snub to the European market in general.

The keynote speeches were largely underwhelming, though the highlight was Lionhead boss Peter Molyneux's witty exploration of videogame violence, 'Combat: Time To Evolve'.



There are plenty of places left on our own planet that aren't yet enamoured with videogames. Time to change that?

LEIPZIG BY NUMBERS

183,000 visitors in 2006

134,000 visitors in 2005

42% of visitors were aged over 20

17% of visitors were female

90% of visitors will return next year

2,600 journalists were in attendance

368 exhibitors were in attendance

91% of exhibitors will return next year

89% of exhibitors claimed the show had gone 'well' or 'very well'

Leipzig saw multi-player footage of vehicles and boats being driven around the sprawling environments of EA's *Crysis*.

At Leipzig, Microsoft announced exclusive next-gen rights to *FIFA* and *Pro Evo*.

Speaking to nearly 400 people, Molyneux outlined his thoughts on the importance of improving combat within videogames, saluting the simple but deep control system of *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, and stating his preference for elaborate one-hit kills. Juxtaposing footage from *Kill Bill* with a re-enactment of a real fight, Molyneux claimed that, "Real-life combat is rubbish," and suggested that developers look toward the dramatised action of cinema for inspiration. To make his point, Molyneux then showed footage from the spiral staircase fight in *Robin Hood: Prince Of Thieves*, outlining that the fight was made more exciting due to the restrictions placed on it by its location. Very few movie fights take place in bland, non-interactive arenas, and videogames would do well to alter the number and type of moves available dependent on the environment and the objects within it.

Molyneux was later quizzed about the effect the Wii controller might have on videogame combat, offering, "If you wanted to make a big difference, where's the best place to make it? I think the controller is definitely it. There's no doubt in my mind that controllers are changing, and they're changing very fast." However, despite admitting his amazement at the prospect of motion-sensitive controls, Molyneux does have reservations about Wii's defining characteristic.

"I'm an incredibly lazy person when I play games," he admitted, "and actually slouching back on my sofa, playing games on my beer belly is my most comfortable position. When I have to get up, it's painful. I make noises and start grunting." Far from actually criticising the Wii, Molyneux was merely echoing a growing concern over the technology's suitability to genres requiring long play sessions. "You cannot do it for 20 hours," he concluded.

Leipzig's organisers have trumpeted 2006 as their most successful event yet, and in terms of organisation they are probably right. The fact that the overwhelming majority of the stands were compèred in German will prove a stumbling block for gamers visiting from outside the country, and will more than likely change should the event's profile continue to improve. Many felt underwhelmed by the keynote speeches, the Tokyo Game Show being most industry players' clear first choice, and many demos were criticised for being exactly the same as those at E3. With the new-format E3 beginning next year, however, Leipzig will finally be out of its shadow, and with little of comparable size before it on the calendar, it will be the industry's first chance of the year to showcase its wares. The pieces are in place and 2007 could be the year that Leipzig becomes big news.

"I THINK **THE CONTROLLER** IS DEFINITELY THE **BEST PLACE TO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE.** THERE'S NO DOUBT IN MY MIND THAT **CONTROLLERS ARE CHANGING**, AND THEY'RE CHANGING **VERY FAST"**
PETER MOLYNEUX, LIONHEAD STUDIOS

"A NEW IP IS A WONDERFULLY FREEING THING"

BILL ROPER

TRY GOING AFTER A DIFFERENT KETTLE OF FISH

Former director of Blizzard Entertainment and now head of Flagship Studios Bill Roper urged developers to focus their efforts on creating new IPs, and to take care that they are "exploitable" across all media. With costs spiralling, new revenue streams are being sought industry wide, and Roper suggested the answer was to target new markets.

"Developers of film, television, books, music, comics, and any number of ancillary properties are hungry for well thought-out intellectual properties," Roper explained vehemently. "They're casting a broader net to find them because they've run out of ideas. Building and growing your intellectual property is really the dream of most developers, however, and for good reason, this means an awful lot of work, and it's also something that's rare. Selling your company doesn't have to be the end goal, but having a solid, marketable, I'll even say exploitable IP is a wonderfully freeing thing."

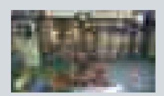
RELEASE LIST

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

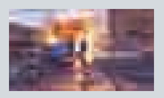


MULTI-FORMAT CHART

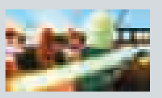
1 DEAD RISING
Format: 360
Publisher: Capcom



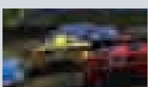
2 SAINTS ROW
Format: 360
Publisher: THQ



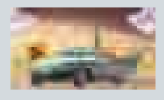
3 LEGO STAR WARS II
Format: 360, PS2, PSP, PC, Xbox
Publisher: Activision



4 TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED
Format: 360
Publisher: Atari



5 CARS
Format: PC, PS2, PSP, XBox
Publisher: Nintendo



6 THE SIMS 2: GLAMOUR LIFE STUFF
Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts

7 GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES
Format: PS2, PSP
Publisher: Rockstar

8 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS
Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo

9 THE SIMS 2
Format: GC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
Publisher: Electronic Arts

10 DR KAWASHIMA'S BRAIN TRAINING: HOW OLD IS YOUR BRAIN?
Format: DS
Publisher: Activision

THIS MONTH – SEPTEMBER

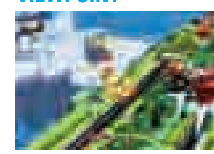
Date	Title	Format
06 Oct	Barnyard	GBA, GC, PC, PS2
06 Oct	Gothic 3	PC
06 Oct	Heroes Of Annihilated Empires	PC
06 Oct	Mage Knight: Apocalypse	PC
06 Oct	Nascar 07	PC, PS2
06 Oct	NBA Live 07	360, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
06 Oct	Open Season	360, GBA, GC, DS, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
06 Oct	Pilot Academy	PS2
06 Oct	Taito Legends Power-Up	PS2
13 Oct	Asterix & Obelix XXL2	DS
13 Oct	Disney's American Dragon	DS, GBA
13 Oct	English Training	DS
13 Oct	Maelstrom	PC
13 Oct	Power Stone Collection	PSP
13 Oct	Rebelstar: Tactical Command	GBA
13 Oct	Ridge Racer 2	PSP
13 Oct	Scarface: The World Is Yours	PS2, Xbox
20 Oct	Battlefield 2142	PC
20 Oct	Destroy All Humans! 2	PS2, Xbox
20 Oct	GTA: Vice City Stories	PSP
20 Oct	New Zealand Story Revolution	DS
20 Oct	Spin Out	PSP
20 Oct	The Sims 2: Pets	DS, GBA, GC, PS2, PSP
27 Oct	Every Extend Extra	PSP
27 Oct	The Legend Of Spyro: New Beginning	DS, GBA, PS2
27 Oct	Marvel Ultimate Alliance	360, GBA, PS2, Xbox
27 Oct	Metal Slug Anthology	PSP
27 Oct	Puzzleloop	DS
27 Oct	Splinter Cell: Double Agent	360, GC, PS2, Xbox
27 Oct	Warhammer 40,000: DOW – Dark Crusade	PC
27 Oct	WWII: Battle Over Europe	PS2
TBC	Tony Hawks Project 8	360, PS2, PC, Xbox
TBC	Crackdown	360
TBC	Canis Canem Edit (formerly Bully)	PS2, Xbox

VIEWPOINT



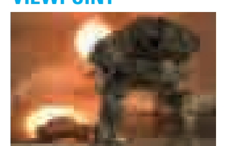
GOTHIC 3
Format: PC
Publisher: JoWooD
The German dinosaur RPG just missed out on review this issue – expect coverage in issue 50.

VIEWPOINT



POWER STONE COLLECTION
Format: PSP
Publisher: Capcom
The definition of 'perfect port'. No PSP owner should be without it.

VIEWPOINT



BATTLEFIELD 2142
Format: PC
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Furthering DICE's reputation, this is another stellar instalment in the *Battlefield* franchise.

VIEWPOINT

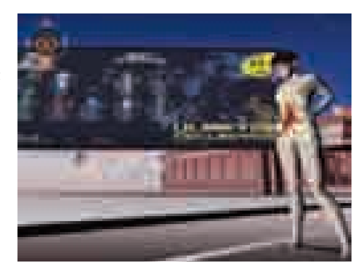


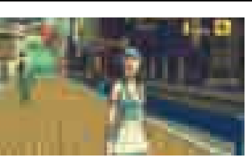
EVERY EXTEND EXTRA
Format: PSP
Publisher: BV Games
When Mizuguchi mixes action with music, he rarely misfires. *E3* is a fine example of his talent.

BARGAIN BASEMENT

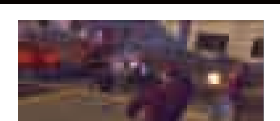
The best deals this month

KILLER7
Format: GameCube
Publisher: Capcom
Where: www.game.net
Price: £7.99
You owe it to yourself. In a climate where gamers forever mourn a lack of originality, it's nothing short of criminal that *killer7* made so small a commercial impact upon release. Right yesterday's wrongs.



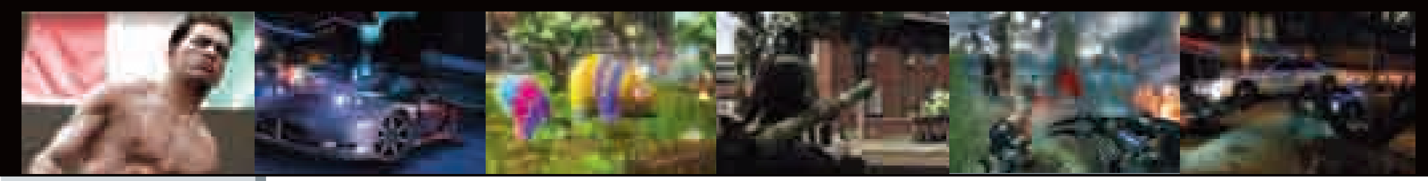


JET SET RADIO FUTURE
Format: Xbox **Publisher:** Sega
Where: www.amazon.co.uk **Price:** £4.99
Old but still fantastic. Say goodbye to the ageing Xbox in style with Sega's classy gem.



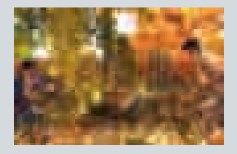
SAINTS ROW
Format: Xbox 360 **Publisher:** THQ
Where: www.playasia.com **Price:** £22.99
They may all have been snapped up, but you can get your hands on the region-free *'Row* for less than 25 quid.

Check out the bargains thread at www.gamestm.co.uk/forum for bang-up-to-date deals. Your find could well feature on these hallowed pages.

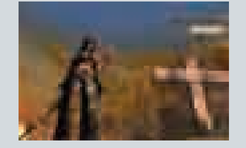


games™ IMPORT WATCH

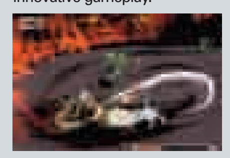
KENGO ZERO
Format: 360
Publisher: Genki
More *Bushido* action, this time with the enhanced power of 360. Visually solid, with deep, tactical combat and a nice line in bloody death. Perfect for anyone already bored of *Ninety Nine Nights* and *Dead Or Alive 4*.



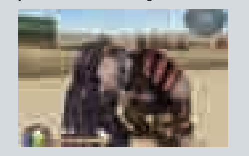
BULLET WITCH
Format: 360
Publisher: Atari
A fairly standard action-adventure romp with pleasant visuals, *Bullet Witch* retains the gothic aesthetic that so many third-person actioners use. The UK release is still 'to be confirmed', so it may be wise to import.



OKAMI
Format: PS2
Publisher: Capcom
Finally available in the US, Capcom's wonderful adventure can now be experienced by the English-speaking world. Gorgeous visuals, an epic storyline and genuinely innovative gameplay.



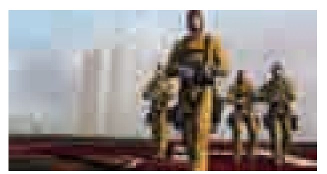
GOD HAND
Format: PS2
Publisher: Capcom
More Capcom love comes in the form of *God Hand*, the bizarre actioner from Clover. Featuring ocean-deep combat, a compelling plot and an entire bucket full of insanity, this is just our sort of thing.



NOVEMBER

Date	Title	Format
03 Nov	Bratz: Babyz	GBA, PC
03 Nov	Bratz: Forever Diamondz	GC
03 Nov	Need For Speed Carbon	360, DS, GBA, GC, PS2, PC, PSP, Xbox
06 Nov	Elite Beat Agents	DS
06 Nov	Final Fantasy V Advance	GBA
10 Nov	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon	DS, GBA
10 Nov	Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Summoner	PS2
10 Nov	WWE Smackdown Vs RAW 2007	360, PS2, PSP
17 Nov	Gears Of War	360
24 Nov	Flushed Away	DS, GBA, GC, PS2
TBC	Eragon	360, DS, GBA, PC, PS2, PSP, Xbox
TBC	Football Manager 2007	PC, PSP
TBC	Guitar Hero 2	PS2
TBC	Killzone: Liberation	PSP
TBC	Medieval II: Total War	PC
TBC	Naruto Ultimate Ninja	PS2
TBC	Sonic Rivals	PSP
TBC	Test Drive Unlimited	PC, PS2, PSP
TBC	The Sopranos	PS2, 360

FORWARD THINKING…



KANE & LYNCH
Format: 360, PC
Publisher: Eidos
Heavily influenced by Michael Mann, Io's latest looks incredible.

2007

FORWARD THINKING…



FORZA 2
Format: 360
Publisher: Microsoft
Microsoft's stunning ride is teetering on the pre-Christmas brink. Fingers crossed.

TBC 06

DECEMBER

TBC	Gunpey	DS, GBA

TBC '06

TBC	Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway	360, PC
TBC	Forza Motorsport 2	360
TBC	Gods & Heroes: Rome Rising	PC
TBC	Legend Of Zelda: Twilight Princess	Wii
TBC	Lumines 2	PSP
TBC	Phantasy Star Universe	360, PC, PS2
TBC	Rayman Raving Rabbids	Wii
TBC	Red Steel	Wii
TBC	Silent Hill Origins	PSP
TBC	Sonic The Hedgehog	360
TBC	Stranglehold	360, PC
TBC	TimeShift	360, PC
TBC	Too Human	360
TBC	Viva Piñata	360
TBC	Wii Sports	Wii

FORWARD THINKING…



ELITE BEAT AGENTS
Format: DS
Publisher: Nintendo
Oh yes. More *Ouendan* loveliness will be lighting up DS Lite very soon.

06 November

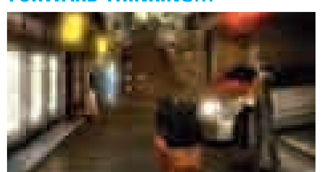
FORWARD THINKING…



ASSASSIN'S CREED
Format: 360, PS3
Publisher: Ubisoft
With PS3 exclusivity no more, this should become the first next-gen, cross-platform killer app.

2007

FORWARD THINKING…



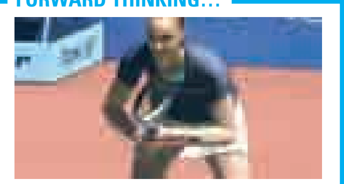
RED STEEL
Format: Wii
Publisher: Ubisoft
There are reservations about *Red Steel's* sensitivity, but it's a strong indication of Wii's capabilities.

TBA

TBC '07

TBC	Assassin's Creed	PS3
TBC	Avalon	PS3
TBC	Coded Arms Assault	PS3
TBC	Dark Sector	PS3
TBC	Devil May Cry 4	PS3
TBC	Elveon	360, PS3, PC
TBC	Fatal Inertia	PS3
TBC	Fight Night Round 3	PS3
TBC	Getaway	PS3
TBC	God Of War 2	PS2
TBC	Gran Turismo HD	PS3
TBC	Halo 3	360
TBC	Heart Of Empire: Rome	PC
TBC	Heavenly Sword	PS3
TBC	Indiana Jones 2007	360, PS3
TBC	Kane & Lynch	360, PC
TBC	Lost Planet	360
TBC	Metal Gear Solid: Portable Ops	PSP
TBC	Need For Speed Carbon	360, DS, GBA, GC, PC, PS2, PS3, PSP, Wii, Xbox
TBC	Ni-Oh	PS3
TBC	Phoenix Wright: Justice For All	DS
TBC	Rainbow Six Vegas	360, PC, PS3, PSP
TBC	Rogue Galaxy	PS2
TBC	Sega Rally	360, PS3
TBC	Star Trek Legacy	360, PC
TBC	The Darkness	360, PS3
TBC	Virtua Fighter 5	PS3
TBC	Virtua Tennis 3	360, PS3
TBC	WarHawk	PS3

FORWARD THINKING…



VIRTUA TENNIS 3
Format: PS3, 360
Publisher: Sega
A disappointment in the arcade, here's hoping that the console versions reinvigorate the series.

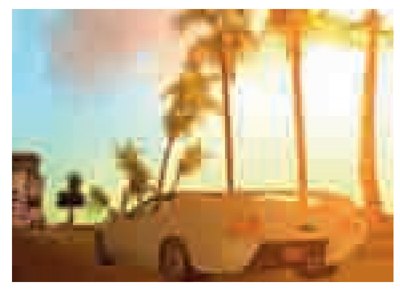
TBC 07

***PLEASE NOTE:** While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.*

ESSENTIAL PURCHASE
You'll definitely be wanting these

GTA: VICE CITY STORIES
Format: PSP
Publisher: Rockstar

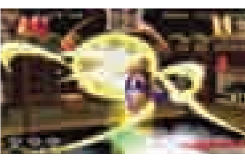
If there's one rule in gaming, it's 'you can't go wrong with *GTA*'. Just missing out on the review treatment this month, Rockstar's return to Vice will be the best game available on PSP. You heard it here first, folks.





CRACKDOWN
Format: 360 **Publisher:** Microsoft

It may be as purple as a homoerotic hell, but the draw of genuine freedom of choice cannot be sniffed at.



POWER STONE COLLECTION
Format: PSP **Publisher:** Capcom

Perfect conversions. Bright, bold brash and brimming with colour.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH GENUINE AMERICAN BRANDON SHEFFIELD



This is obviously not a ghost. He must be a goblin.

"YOU KIDS IN THE UK ARE THE FATTEST EUROPEANS I'VE ON THAT ONE. MIGHT WANT TO CUT DOWN ON THE

When last I left you, I was about to embark on a trip to Europe. Well, I've just got home, and yes, it again surprises me how fat everyone is here. Maybe we're just storing it up for the great famine once we've brought the world crashing down. I will say though, that you kids in the UK are the fattest Europeans I've seen, so congratulations on that one. Might want to cut down on the… chips… or whatever.

So, upon my return I was greeted with the lovely news that I had been summoned for jury duty. We have to do this once a year, theoretically, though I've just thrown the letters in the trash for the last six. I decided to just do it this time since it was the fourth 'do this or we put you in jail' notice I'd received. What with the current political climate, I figured it best not to tempt fate. After all, you just have to go down to the court house and be obnoxious or weird – then they won't put you on the jury, and then you can go home. Plus, as a bonus, you have a day off work and the government mandates that they have to pay you for it regardless.

If I hated my job, I'd have actually tried to get on a jury, but I don't hate it. I do hate sitting in stuffy rooms with smelly citizens and clueless bureaucrats. So I dressed all in black and put on a lovely inverted crucifix I purchased at Camden Town in the UK (thanks guys) for five pounds and five American dollars.

I was totally overdressed for the event, obviously, as everyone else in attendance had barely rolled out of bed. It was 8.30am so only elderly women were dressed up with any kind of care. The first thing I had to do was fill out a form – this would determine whether I was appropriate for serving on a jury. They did make it rather obvious: "Do you have any religious beliefs, social or life experience which would make you impartial toward law enforcement, and thus unable to be an impartial juror?"

Why yes. I have those. So from then on, it was a matter of waiting it out, and crossing my fingers. After reading several chapters in Kafka's *The Castle*, which anyone who hasn't read *The Trial* knows is the best possible book to read while in bureaucratic hell, I decided to try out the new *Ghosts 'N Goblins*. I came fully prepared for boredom, so had a PSP, a GBA, an MP3 player, and two books. The PSP doesn't generally do anything to boredom aside from instilling it, but I hoped this one would be different.

It *was* a bit different – the game has some nice colours, good *Castlevania*-type music, and enjoyable weapons and scenarios. And then they decided they needed to not let you control the distance of your jump. If you've jumped straight up, you can't stray from that course, even on the way down. If you've jumped to the left, you go a certain distance. You can kind of control it on your double-jump, which you have to earn, but still. What they've made here is a platforming game (and this is a platformer, much more than any before in the series), where one of the two main functions – those being jump and shoot – is greatly crippled.

I assume they did this in order to make it old-school. The series always had set jumps, so this one should as well. This is a common



SEEN, SO CONGRATULATIONS CHIPS… OR… WHATEVER"

problem in retro attempts – people still seem to think retro means limited. Those limitations were often down to immature programming skills, or limitations of processors themselves. In the case of *GNG*, the entire game was designed with that limited jumping mechanic in mind, and it was a simple matter to employ it in difficult situations. After all, it was used primarily for avoiding enemies, and not as often for proper platforming. In this game though, precise timing of jumps is the norm – only it's frustratingly ridiculous, due to the limits they've imposed.

That retro feeling people strive for comes not from the limitations themselves, but from how the game feels as a whole. If they had simply designed another standard *GNG*, this jumping mechanic might have worked. But they didn't, they made this game instead. There are games that get the retro thing right. The freeware game *Cave Story* from Pixel does a good job of creating an immersive-yet-chunky 2D world, with appropriate and interesting power-ups. Scrolling shooters are consistently satisfying in their old-school nature, as they limit you by virtue of the scrolling screen, but not in a way that confounds you.

It's easy to say 'it's just part of the game; you have to figure out how to use it'. Fair enough, but there are so many games out there that have good, solid control. There's no reason, other than nostalgia, to waste one's time with a game that doesn't. With any luck more developers will wise up to this. I love some nouveau-retro games, I just wish they'd love me back. At least I didn't get picked for jury duty.

Many thanks



AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

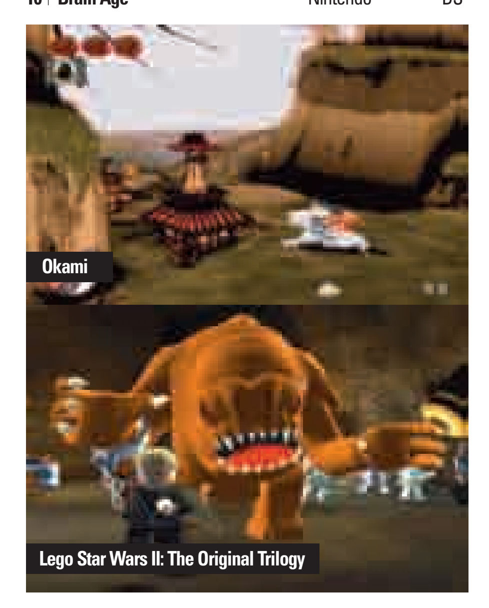


BIG FAIRS

We have lots of fairs here in the US of A, and it's really just so we have places to wave our large flags. I just attended one, drank a lot, ate lots of greasy Mexican food, and bought some chintzy jewellery crap for my mom. Everyone complains about us Americans and our need for excess – but you must admit excess can be quite fun sometimes.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Blue Rescue Team	Nintendo	DS
2	Lego Star Wars II: Original Trilogy	LucasArts	PS2
3	Lego Star Wars II: Original Trilogy	LucasArts	GC
4	Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Red Rescue Team	Nintendo	DS
5	Lego Star Wars II: Original Trilogy	LucasArts	Xbox
6	Okami	Capcom	PS2
7	Lego Star Wars II: Original Trilogy	LucasArts	PC
8	Cooking Mama	Nintendo	DS
9	Madden NFL 07	Electronic Arts	PS2
10	Brain Age	Nintendo	DS



Okami

Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS



The German ratings body has refused to rate *Dead Rising*, halting production of the game there.

"I ACCIDENTALLY HIT A MAN IN THE AND REGRETTED WHAT THAT CARELESSNESS DID

Are you all enjoying *Dead Rising* over there? I hope so. I won't even pretend to be upset about the game being released in the West two months ahead of its Japanese release, because the game's region-free and playable on my Japanese console. This wouldn't be a column if I didn't complain about something, so let's complain about **games™** giving the game an eight when they should have given it a ten. It's the most brilliant game of the millennium. So what if the survivor AI sucks? I offered to write the review, though I reckon the editor knew I would probably just type the letters 'OMG' 700 times, and decided it wouldn't be a good idea.

At any rate, *Dead Rising*, like *Resident Evil 4* before it, is being heavily censored for its release in Japan. In some previous Capcom games, like *Shadow Of Rome*, excessively gory fatality moves were removed completely. In *Resi 4* decapitations didn't occur and the blood was severely toned down. In addition, the concept of the headshot was eliminated. In other words, yes, shooting a zombie in the head is the same as shooting it in the shoulder. The idea of the instant kill was also done away with so that, reportedly, the game would not serve as a "murder sim" that might "educate" young players in killing methods. Of course, the news of the censorship exposed impressionable gamers to the fact that 'gunshot wound to the head = dead', which may have done more harm than good.

Dead Rising's censorship will involve the removal of most of the blood (one can argue that zombies don't need to bleed anyway) and any move that results in dismemberment or decapitation, which is deemed too grotesque for a videogame. Most importantly, the ability to 'accidentally' kill an innocent human character will be totally taken out. This is to distinguish the game from *Grand Theft Auto*, which would thrive on the player's ability to goof off and shoot old ladies with a sniper rifle.

I have personally found that *Dead Rising* handles its context with virtuoso style, and never was I tempted to off a person I was supposed to be protecting, for the hell of it. I accidentally hit a man in the face with a dumbbell and regretted what that carelessness did for my final score. The sheer number of zombies lumbering around served as animated punch bags; they helped me relieve my stress and focus on the mission. Though I didn't want to kill that one guy, an accident is an accident, and accidents happen. For this reason, I can say I don't think it's right to remove this feature from the game.

Furthermore, the game has already been deemed worthy of the Computer Entertainment Ratings Organisation (CERO) Z rating. No, Z doesn't stand for zombies: it's the new form of the CERO-18 rating, which apparently wasn't clear enough. Seriously – CERO's press release said it switched from numbers (ALL, 12, 15, 17, 18) to letters (A, B, C, D, Z) for "clarity purposes". If you ask me, that's kind of nuts.

I suppose the new system illustrates the rift between the highest rating and the second highest. In the old system, it was just 17 and 18. What are kids supposed to learn in a year? How to wield a shotgun



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON #49: DISCUSSING DEAD RISING IN A WAY THAT MAKES YOU OUT TO BE A HARDCORE GAMER (TAKEN FROM ANONYMOUS COMMENTS ON 2CH, JAPAN'S LARGEST FORUM)

Kojinteki ni wa shujinkou no sukiru wa jama nandayona.
Personally, I think the hero's skills are a little annoying.

Kanpeki na zonbi shichueeshon wo mezasu nara shujinkou ga tsuyosugiru
If they were aiming to create the perfect zombie situation, the hero is too strong.

Jaianto suingu shitari karate choppu de setsudan shitari ippanjin wa dekiNEEEEE
Normal people can't DO stuff like the giant swing, or karate-chop zombies' limbs off.

Raundokikku to hanmaa suroo kuraika, genjituteki nano wa.
The roundhouse kick and the hammer throw are realistic enough, I guess.

Sukiru wo jibun de torihazushi kanou ni shite kurete, mugen moodo ni ha sukiru fukanou moodo ga areba…
Now, if they would let you turn your skills off on your own, or make a skill-less mode within infinite mode…

FACE WITH A DUMBBELL FOR MY FINAL SCORE"

while smoking a cigar, with one's hand around the waist of a gorgeous woman? How to not puke at the sight of blood?

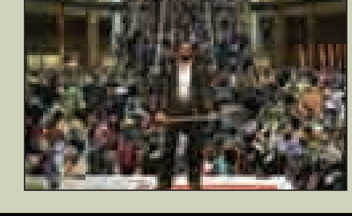
With the Z, CERO has shot itself in the foot, and the wound is quite bloody. The Z emphasises the difference between the 17 and 18 ratings. It says, 'This is our rating system, where all the ratings are merely suggestions, which you'd do well to consider, except for this one rating right here, which we actually have some plan to enforce'. Doesn't this make your whole ratings system look kind of ludicrous?

I understand Capcom's social role, which dictates that it wants to keep from glorifying violence (hence giving up on the *GTA* series, which it published up through *Vice City*), though I do believe there comes a point where you have to respect the creators' – the Japanese creators' – artistic visions. Or maybe it's cutting the violence out of the game because it realises kids will find some way to buy it despite the Z rating?

It's a wonder they let games about zombies exist here, at all. A culture that places such emphasis on history and respect for one's elders doesn't take kindly to the idea of desecrating the dead. Then again, all of those games *are* set in America.

Kind regards





ACCIDENTAL ANTI-HERO

Though the idea of ultra-violence was arguably invented by American game designers in *Mortal Kombat*, there were many Japanese games before then that approached 'mature' levels of violence. Take *Golgo 13: Top-Secret Episode*, on the NES: you're a sniper who killed government officials, and can spend a night in a hotel with a girl to regain your HP. Then in swooped *Mortal Kombat* damaging anything mildly mature. *killer7* tried to use violence as expression, though I reckon there's too much debate about that game's worth. No, I'm going to talk about *Monster Hunter*. In Japan, the game was rated okay for ages 12 and up. In America, it was 13 and up, though only after removing the blood. See, you're killing monsters that look like living creatures. In America, portraying the injury of animals as entertainment is vaguely taboo, so the blood was erased. A knuckleheaded move because the game used a unique damage scoring system that didn't involve life bars – you knew you were doing damage when blood was coming out. So, in America animals can die as long as they don't bleed, and in Japan, innocent people can die as long as it's not your fault. Sums it up perfectly really.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Tales Of Phantasia: Full Voice Edition	Bandai/Namco	PSP
2	New Super Mario Bros.	Nintendo	DS
3	Final Fantasy III	SquareEnix	DS
4	Tingle RPG	Nintendo	DS
5	Brain Training 2	Nintendo	DS
6	Cooking Navigator	Nintendo	DS
7	Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	GBA
8	Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	DS
9	Phantasy Star Universe	Sega	PS2
10	Mario Hoops 3-On-3	Nintendo	DS

(Updated week ending 9 September 2006)

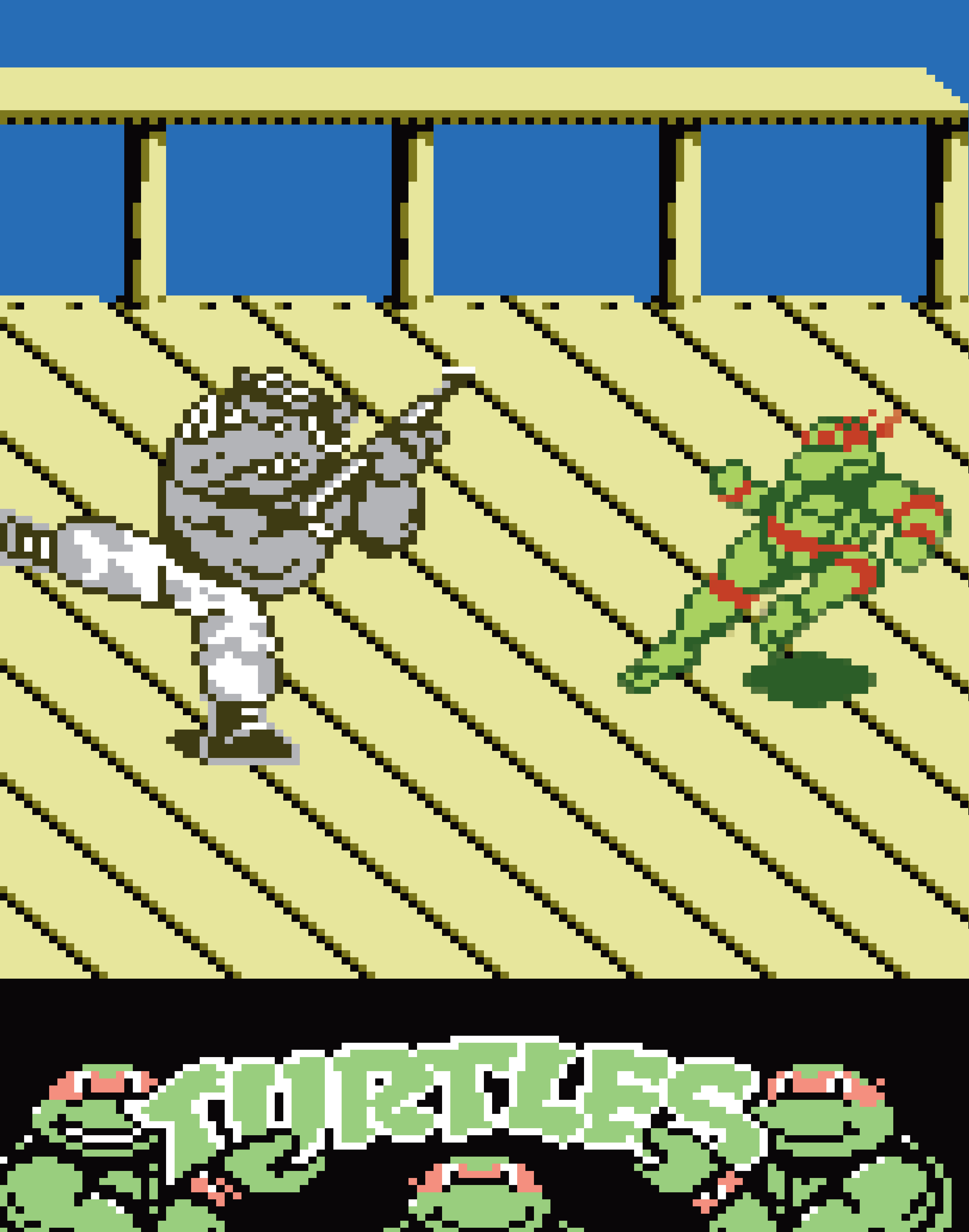


Final Fantasy III

Phantasy Star Universe

See you in shell **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III: The Manhattan Project, NES [Konami] 1991**




TURTLES



Motion controllers. Insane price-points. Last-minute delays. For now at least, the next generation is in the hands of Microsoft, and leading the charge is Gears of War. gamesTM visits Epic's North Carolina HQ for a closer look...


OF WAR

Next generation. Nearly a year in and defining the term remains as slippery a task as the day Xbox 360 hit shelves. For cynics, 'next generation' is a marketing tool, created by Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo to give their latest endeavours mystique; for realists next generation is simply three machines, with every game released automatically in the club by association; but, more than anything else, the next generation is about one thing: expectation.

Should you be remotely interested in the new technology, a set of expectations will have formed in your psyche. With two consoles yet to arrive and the potential of the third years from being realised, every gamer has a perception of what the next generation should be, and, by extension, what doesn't make the grade. This year's E3 stood out due to the hugely conflicting responses to the games and technology on show. For every one that loved the Wii controls, there were five that found them irritating. For every one that sneered at the same old shooting, driving and fighting from Sony and Microsoft, there were a dozen that stared amazed at the graphics.

In truth, the meaning of the phrase is irrelevant, and if there has been a lack of enthusiasm for the next generation thus far it's down to game quality and not an inability to pin down two measly words. To date, only *Oblivion* has turned heads to a sufficient degree, but that will soon change. The coming months herald a slew of promising titles, and sitting at the top of the pile will be *Gears Of War*. Our recent visit to Epic's North Carolina HQ confirmed that *Gears* is shaping up to be the most exciting prospect for some time, though lead designer Cliffy B is all too aware of the pressure that the next-gen tag can bring.

"The problem with this industry is that with every generation and every new game, you have to reinvent how characters walk, how they interact, how they shoot, everything has to be tweaked," he claims. "Someday we'll get to the point where we don't have to do that, but with next gen just making a competent shooter is a challenge in itself." In an industry where technology drags creativity along behind it, the development community is always playing catch-up. The next generation has changed the playing field, leaving developers to re-learn tricks that they'd only recently mastered. "What you often see with launch titles is the bare bones. It's a game, but it's just a box with black-and-white writing," Cliffy states. "Only when you get to the second or third wave of games can you start taking risks. Only once you're comfortable with how to get the door working or turn the light on can you start twisting and doing cool shit."

SHOULD YOU TRY and form a picture of what a game developer would look like, chances are it wouldn't resemble Cliffy B. All bleach blonde hair and nervous energy, he looks and sounds like he's stepped off a SoCal beach, but from the battered, sticker-coated NES taking pride of place on his desk to the frenzied pantomime of his delivery, his enthusiasm for games is obvious and infectious. For all his talk of the challenges of developing so early in the next gen, this

The sniper rifle: the bottler's weapon of choice in combat.



The 'Don't f**k with us' squad have arrived. [Applause.]



clearly doesn't apply to *Gears Of War*. "I think it's the case with all creatives that it's never good enough," he explains. "There's other stuff I wanted to get in, but my gut told me that games promoting this jumping, circle-strafing dance routine felt stupid to me, it didn't feel right. I can appreciate what *Rainbow Six* and that type of game is going for, but it still feels sluggish to me. Wait, let me do my little demo here…"

At this, Cliffy pops out of his seat. "If I'm getting shot at and I'm heading for cover, I'm not gonna be like this (mimes gently plodding along before crouching behind a wastepaper bin). I'm gonna be running like a banshee, crouched like this (stoops low before hurtling around the room and slamming his body against the wall), slammin' in and hyperventilating, you know? That's how it's gonna be because it's your life, right?" If Cliffy's been doing this shtick for every journalist to pass through his office today, then it doesn't show. Right now, we're hanging on his every word.

Cliffy retakes his seat and continues. "Maybe it's because I'm impatient, maybe I have ADHD or something, but *Gears* boils down to a platform game on the X and Y axis. You're essentially throwing a grappling hook around at points in the environment, and that grappling hook has you sliding into the wall. It's fast tactics. There's also an element of stealth. One moment you'll be creeping around, then you'll realise where the guy is and sneak up behind him and chainsaw him. We've been able to add some nice twists to the formula: narrative elements, the camera, our cover system, reloading your gun faster and having it jam. All that stuff is what makes the game," he pauses… a moment of calm. "I think it's turned out pretty well, people are digging it."

THE PLOT, A clear reference to *War Of The Worlds*, describes an invasion on Earth ▷

Anatomy Of A Headshot

1 You've acquired your target and zoom in with the sniper rifle.

2 For maximum effect, one bullet to the head is all you'll need.

3 Christ on a bike. The impact sees copious blood splatter.

4 There's no surviving this. The corpse crumbles to the ground.

5 And the end result? One less bad guy breathing.

■ The action is frenetic, the combat is close and the rewards are plentiful.

■ Quite how Epic created this much graphical detail is astonishing.

from within. A reptilian race, the Locust, pour from beneath the surface, laying waste to cities and mankind. As videogame narratives go, it's an unremarkable and typically derivative premise, but enthusiasm has long been used to paper over the cracks in game logic, and it's no different here.

It isn't only Cliffy who struggles to bottle his excitement at the mention of *Gears*, the team at Epic has filled the game world with an abundance of detail to flesh out the story. Discarded papers tell tales of the invasion. Old news reports play on broken TV sets. *Gears'* premise is classic B-movie material, and B-movies rely on the passion and endeavour of the team behind them to make them credible. Epic has that in spades.

Setting up any game as the saviour of the next generation is more a curse than a blessing, and it's important to keep expectations in check when approaching *Gears*. Anybody expecting a radical and cerebral revision of the narrative modes of gaming is to be disappointed – Epic neither wanted nor tried for it. Brutal, absurd and real in equal measure, *Gears* is a pure, visceral experience. If Microsoft and Sony's early contribution to the next gen will be the refreshment and perfection of existing forms, then *Gears* might soon be held as a prime example of just that. Parallels can be drawn between this and past titles, yet *Gears* transcends all such comparisons through its scope and flawless execution.

For sheer, slack-jawed wonder, our first contact with *Gears* quickly brought to mind the last title to legitimise a generation: *Halo*.

We were allowed access to the opening two levels. The first of these saw Marcus Fenix – a disgraced veteran and *Gears'* morally ambiguous hero – being sprung from prison by Dominik, a fellow soldier. The level could be approached as normal or in the form of a tutorial, chosen by turning left or right at a crossroads early on. Whatever the path, the prison was clearly designed to get the player used to the finer points of the gameplay and so felt like a diluted form of what was to come – a necessary evil as Epic has produced a truly challenging piece of work. The familiar elements of *Gears* grant confidence, but even on the most lenient difficulty this will test the skills of an average gamer. Use of cover is paramount to survival, and levels are helpfully littered with suitable objects. The A button will move you to cover, but it also allows you to spin between different spots, vault over the top, as well as several other context-sensitive manoeuvres. Keeping A pressed will make Marcus sprint; reach a piece of cover in full flight and you'll slam straight into position.

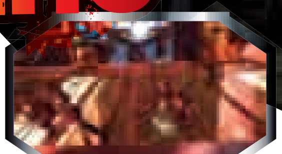
THE MOST EFFECTIVE fighting is done from cover, gung-ho tactics resulting in little more than a face full of lead from the strikingly clever opposition. There are several approaches to attacking from cover: blind-firing will suppress an enemy but little more than that, pulling the right trigger will make you pop up and shoot but with no accuracy, while the left trigger enters an aiming mode that helps you shoot accurately but restricts vision and movement. Each approach has its uses, but at the wrong time can prove catastrophic.

Combat is made up of this kind of compromise, and while they work directly against the instincts that years of repetitive shooters have nurtured, Epic struggled to include as many as possible. "The game builds up these trade-offs," Cliffy explains. "You can be accurate, but you have to hold the trigger and get tunnel vision. You can pick up a weapon, but it takes a second and in that time you could die. You can reload, but do it quick or your gun might jam. If you have a grenade you can just toss it, but you're not going to hit the mark. Everything is useful in a given situation. In context, there's options. I can't even remember where this question started."

Epic asserts that one facet of next-generation gaming must be accessibility. Increased scope has allowed gameplay to become dauntingly complex, encouraging newcomers to give up before they try. *Gears'* control system – summed up by Cliffy as, "How do I make the dude on screen do cool shit with as few button presses as possible?" – is refreshingly economical, so while the difficulty will

CHAOS ENGINE

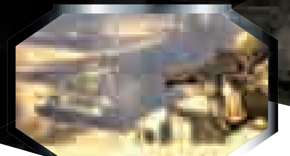
Since the first version of the Unreal engine emerged in 1998, it has become the byword for excellence in action gaming. It differs from many other engines in that licensees receive the source code of a complete game, which they can then modify using a scripting language called UnrealScript, transforming it into their own title. Any concerns that this approach could hinder the creative process can surely be dispelled by the string of classic titles that have used Unreal technology – the *Deus Ex, Brothers In Arms, Splinter Cell*, and *Rainbow Six* franchises to name a few. The engine is more sophisticated than ever, and with version 3.0 – the power behind *Gears Of War* – now finished, games™ picks five upcoming games that will make use of the technology…



Rainbow Six Vegas
Format: Xbox 360, PS3, PSP, PC
Release Date: TBC '06 (PS3 March)
Unreal has powered pretty much every Tom Clancy game to date, and *Vegas* could be the first title using version 3.0 to hit the shelves, even beating *Gears*.



BioShock
Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3, PC
Release Date: 2007 TBC
Hugely anticipated follow-up to the *System Shock* games, *BioShock* has won 17 E3 awards to date and promises intellect and viscera in equal measure.



Frontlines: Fuel Of War
Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3, PC
Release Date: 2007 TBC
THQ's epic boasts a realistic picture of near-future warfare against the backdrop of an ecological crisis. *Frontlines* may be light on story, but



Q&A

Lead designer Cliffy B and producer Rod Ferguson go into Gears' finer points

games™: How much of the game did we see in the two levels we played?
Rod: Er, you played a level and five eighths. It's a small percentage.
Cliffy: It really is. To put things into perspective, there are a lot more Locust classes still to see as far as variety goes. There are guys called the Grenadiers, there are the Elite Guards, there's the Wretches, and there are a couple of twists to the formula on bosses. The part that you played is still some way from where you get to see different enemies and more weapons. The game starts during the day and goes through the sunset, the evening and night through to the next morning. Jack Bauer would be tired.
Rod: The game represents 36 hours in the life of Marcus Fenix.

games™: How many levels in total?
Cliffy: It's very hard to gauge because there are certain sections that take five minutes, and others that take an hour and a half. I think the industry needs to evolve from thinking about games like a laundry list. We're selling an entertainment experience, and in my opinion we should think of games as one long experience.
Rod: The days of traditional shooters like *Doom* where you could say 'that's a level' and 'that's a level' are long gone. We have environments, and we have chapters of the story within each environment.

games™: How does it feel returning to an original, story-based IP?
Cliffy: Scary stuff. People write pages and pages about if you do a cut-scene it's not a videogame, and how everybody should strive to tell their story like *Half-Life*. You open up your toolkit, as a designer or a creative, and there are 8 million ways you can advance your story. Back in the day we only had one. With *Gears* writing is very important, and we agonised over what these guys were saying in every moment of the game every bit as much as we agonised over graphics.

games™: How long ago did you come up with the concept?
Cliffy: We're not really sure. There were ideas and weapons and characters I wanted to see, but when you start off with something like that it just kind of evolves. The core story is recognisable today from what it was at the start.

games™: Do you learn much of the history of the invasion in the game?
Cliffy: We allude to it. We're big fans of dropping in a few little story elements every now and again… allow people to wonder what they're all about.
Rod: There's also a lot just in the game itself. There are propaganda posters on the walls and newspapers in the newspaper dispensers with related headlines. Things like that.

games™: Why did you opt for regenerating health over medipacks?
Cliffy: For me – as a designer and a gamer – the days of turkey dinners are behind me. I don't want to be going around war zones looking for chicken pot pies. We don't explain it in *Gears* per se, y'know, Marcus has the suit, it's really hi-tech, and when you take damage you get that little red symbol in the middle of the screen. We were surprised at how well it works when people play the game. After all, where are you looking when you're playing? In the middle of the screen, right? It encourages more players to take cover and chill.

games™: What are the differences between the difficulty levels?
Cliffy: There are still a few things we're working on behind the scenes, so I don't want to say too much right now. I'm willing to say that on Insane difficulty you'll have to master cover and active reload, and just really be good at playing the game. It's our equivalent of Legendary on *Halo*. We actually got a report back from Microsoft saying, "Wow, Insane is insane."

games™: Are all the Coalition soldiers in Story mode available in Multi-player?
Cliffy: When you meet a new Coalition soldier in single-player, you get to unlock and play as them in versus multi-player. When you defeat certain Locust classes in single-player you get to play as them in versus.

games™: Are you concerned that in multi-player the chainsaw is too powerful a weapon?
Cliffy: In order to balance the chainsaw, if you get shot you actually lower the chainsaw. In life you wouldn't be able to hold it up anyway. You have to re-press B, and it's to stop the game devolving into a *Braveheart*-style joust with lots of guys just running at each other.

games™: What can you win points for in multi-player?
Cliffy: The goal was not to just reward you for killing people. You get extra points for reviving team-mates, and for executions, melee kills, and headshots. There's a risk to reward.
Rod: We're still balancing right now, so it's not like there's any definite answer. One melee thing you won't see much, because it's high risk, is grenade tag where you can actually walk up and plant a grenade on someone. It's fun with a smoke grenade because they leave a smoke trail as they move around.

games™: Are there novel elements, like the train, in all multi-player maps?
Rod: We tried to put something interesting in all of them, whether it be destructible cover, an environmental hazard or a number of other things.
Cliffy: Tell them about the gas station in the depot level.
Rod: Oh yeah, that's a great example.
Cliffy: In this gas station, if anything explosive gets shot the whole station goes up; anybody anywhere near it is destroyed… which is always fun.

games™: Are you planning a sequel?
Cliffy: That's not something we want to talk about right now. I think it's a really cool universe and I think people will want to know all the details about it. Sometimes, though, it's just easier to put it out there and let it speak for itself for a while.



Chaotic motion blur creates the effect that the shit is most certainly hitting the fan.

Mass Effect
Format: Xbox 360
Release Date: TBA
An ambitious attempt at next-generation gaming, this story-driven RPG should be enlivened by the Unreal engine's predilection for action.

Resident Evil 5
Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
Release Date: TBA
Resident Evil 4 introduced frenetic combat to the survival-horror mix. Unreal's presence is a good indicator that the fifth instalment will take a similar stance.

challenge even the most hardened gamer, it still retains a pick-up-and-play feel.

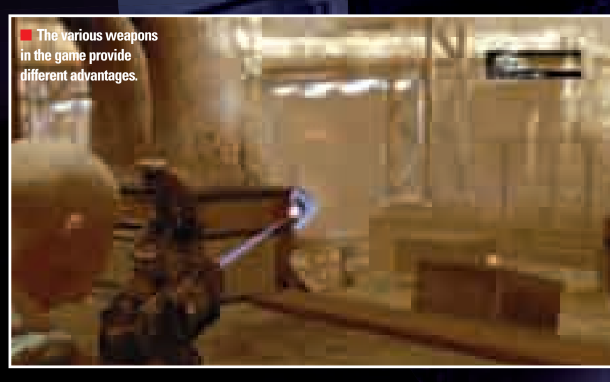
Even in its earliest stages, the game speaks lucidly for itself. The second level, set in a ruined city called Embry, allowed us to flaunt the skills acquired in the first stage. The battered, ornate architecture of the surroundings stood in stark contrast to the functional minimalism of the training level, and carnal thoughts gave way to muted admiration of the glorious visuals. *Gears* immediately suggests itself as the best looking 360 game to date: the bleached out, dirt-smeared environments and restless camera combining to produce a satisfyingly grimy picture of combat. Much has been made of PS3's graphical advantage, but when you can support a game this ravishing there seems little cause for concern. Catching a few minutes with Mark Rein, Epic's vice president, we discussed the reaction to *Gears* so far. "At E3 they went nuts," he recalls. "Cliffy and me were so excited because we'd only shown them this much of the game." (Holds his fingers an inch apart, before stretching his arms out as far as they'll go and flashing us a wicked grin.) "In the finished version there'll be this much."

GEARS STANDS AS a major departure for Epic; it has developed Unreal into one of the most successful brands in gaming. *Gears* being Epic's first original IP since 1997 though, Cliffy admits that he was "terrified" at the prospect of fleshing out the details of his idea. Working directly with Eric Nylund and Susan O'Connor, and drawing inspiration from sources as diverse as *Band Of Brothers* and *A History Of Violence*, Cliffy is happy that the narrative will hook people, leave room for future instalments, and not swamp the gamer with information. "I think we have something that plays out pretty well," he reflects. "When you're watching the cut-scenes – generally four minutes or less – they're quick, they're to the point and then you're back to the game. People treat cut-scene like a dirty word, but only because you have developers who want to be Steven Spielberg forcing their masturbatory marathons on the public. With the amount of money you spent on showing your fancy movie, you could have had two more cool creatures." Story is clearly important to *Gears*, but there's something refreshing about the belief that the narrative must be in the service of gameplay.

Initial suggestions that Epic's return to single-player would result in a below-par Multi-player mode have no foundation. If there's one thing Epic does well it's group gaming, and if there's a conclusion that can be drawn from the next generation so far, it's that the future is online. For Cliffy it was a no-brainer, "Multi-player has always been important to me. We had discussions where we said, 'this is a single-player, co-op game, do we need a versus?' Of course we need versus. People come for single-player and stay for versus, come for the graphics and stay for the gameplay. It's not huge like *Battlefield*, but let *Battlefield* do what *Battlefield* does. We're not that kind of game. We're the kind of game that has you so close to the enemy you can stick a grenade on their head or bury a chainsaw in them. We didn't want to make a game where you're shooting at a guy on the horizon. If you have to use a sniper rifle to play you may want to think about scale."

THIS INTIMATE FEEL is the multi-player's finest quality. The two maps we saw – one in a train station, the other in a mansion – pitted four humans against four Locust, and close enough to each other that you were never more than a minute from the action. Small scale, high intensity. The train station map dropped a team on each side of the tracks where we could choose to take the fight up to the platform or a subterranean tunnel below the tracks. Crates, drums and burned-out cars were scattered about the landscape for cover, and a train hurtled along the track between the opposing teams every few minutes. The level design encouraged two-up, two-down tactics: one team trading fire with the enemy through the carriages of the speeding train, the other heading below to flank them. In such a closed environment, the assault rifle and pistol were best suited to suppressing the enemy. Various other weapons littered the map – smoke and frag grenades; a shotgun; a bow that fired a remote-controlled grenade; and the Boomshot, an extremely powerful gun that fired four grenades at once and was cunningly placed in the centre of the train tracks – but the clear favourite was the chainsaw attached to the underside of your rifle. Bringing a new level of savagery to melee combat, pressing the B button revs up the saw, bisecting anyone unfortunate enough to cross your path. Another neat feature was your ability to observe members of your team and use CCTV cameras around the level after you're dead – great for enjoying the action, even better when used tactically. Departed team-mates can use the feature to track enemy movements and keep you updated, greatly increasing your chances of survival.

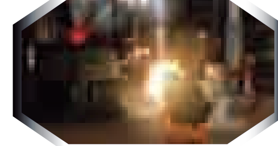
The mansion had a larger play area, and illustrated the variety we can expect from the multi-player maps. Taking place at night during a thunderstorm, the mansion emphatically beat the train station for atmosphere, and with both the interior and exterior of the house to explore made it more difficult to formulate a coherent tactical approach. The dense shadows, lashing rain, tiny rooms and



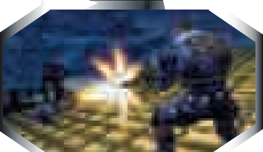
The various weapons in the game provide different advantages.

Doom Generation

Gears Of War looks set to be the finest action game in quite some time, but it isn't the only title looking to redefine carnage for the next generation...



Red Steel
Format: Nintendo Wii
Release Date: Q4 '06
The only FPS being developed from the ground up for the motion controls of the launch of Wii, *Red Steel* should give a clear idea of the suitability of Nintendo's technology for action.



Crackdown
Format: Xbox 360
Release Date: Q4 '06
With its completely open-ended mission structure, you could technically complete *Crackdown* within an hour of starting, but then you'd miss out on the characters' gloriously over-the-top powers.



Kane & Lynch: Dead Men
Format: Xbox 360, PC
Release Date: 2007 TBC
Io Interactive is devoted to story and atmosphere, but *Kane & Lynch* will be far more ferocious than *Hitman*. The titular pair look as compelling as the impressive set pieces.

walled gardens all combined to create a feeling of searing tension and chaos, and the map's distinguishing feature did little to alleviate that. Epic is trying to include one unique element in every map: where the station had its train, the mansion has fully destructible cover. Pillars, boxes, statues, there is no safe haven, no time to breathe. No sooner have you found a spot from which to rain death upon your enemy than it's being picked apart, piece by agonising piece. Cowering behind a sofa in a hail of Locust bullets, and under the scrutiny of *Gears'* producer Rod Ferguson we were desperate to save face and find a way out. Luckily, we had a human on hand to sneak up behind our aggressor and introduce a chainsaw to his belly. "There's a chainsaw in my future," Ferguson chimed. "I… see… power tools."

PREDICTING A MASTERPIECE isn't easy, and it's too early to call *Gears Of War* that. Two levels and some multi-player maps don't give a clear enough impression for reasoned judgement. In that respect, all claims made here on quality could be put down to hype: bite-sized bursts of experience removed from their true context. Whatever your view, *Gears Of War* gave us more enjoyment in two hours than the majority of games provide in their entirety, and feels as next gen as we've seen so far – a classic style of gaming ramped up to a higher level. Not exactly a radical new direction, but then that's Nintendo's job. For Epic, however, the work is far from over, and there's still the future to consider.

"I think we're in a really good position," Cliffy states. "We're free and can do a lot of what we want. I've got 10 million universes in my head and its taken ten years to realise this one. I'd like to spend less time getting to the next." So it's pastures new, then. What about Unreal? A *Gears Of War* sequel, perhaps? "If *Gears* does well we'll consider it, sure," Cliffy answers. "There's something about a new IP, it's like you're taking its virginity when you first get to play. There's yet another *Tom Clancy* game, but as great as that brand is I've played *Tom Clancy* games, I've slept with that person. I've never been in bed with *Gears Of War*, I want to see what that's like. You get magical moments in a new IP like this: the first time you use cover; the first time you shoot a shotgun round a corner or chainsaw somebody. Hopefully we'll make a lasting impression on a generation of young gamers." So, sleeping with *Gears Of War* will provide magical moments for young gamers. Talk about hype.

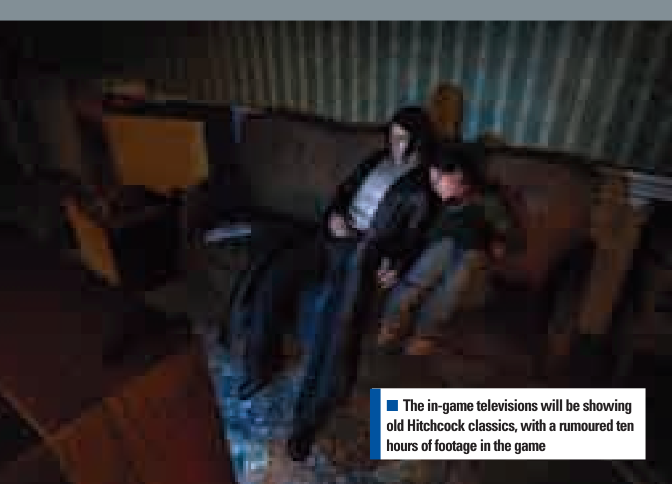


■ *Gears Of War* thrives on adreneline-fuelled action against an overwhelming enemy presence.

Assassin's Creed
Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation3
Release Date: 2007 TBC
Now confirmed as an Xbox 360 game, *Assassin's Creed* has long been considered one of the most impressive next-gen prospects. The possibility of a time-travelling element could be unnecessary.

Cell Factor
Format: PC
Release Date: TBA
Easily the dark horse of the group, *Cell Factor* remains an unknown quantity, but early footage shows physics that are nothing short of amazing. It could be a gimmick; it could also be a great innovation.

THE DARKNESS



The in-game televisions will be showing old Hitchcock classics, with a rumoured ten hours of footage in the game

STARBREEZE'S SHOOTER STEPS OUT OF THE SHADOWS

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3, Xbox 360
ORIGIN: Sweden
PUBLISHER: 2KGames
DEVELOPER: Starbreeze
RELEASE: Q1 '07
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

A visually arresting comic book FPS from the creator of Xbox's fantastic *Chronicles Of Riddick*.

PS3 **Mood. An intangible, almost abstract concept in art and game design; one which simultaneously defines the greatest works while eluding the also-rans.** Games capture mood exceptionally well at times, be it Mario's juvenile exuberance or *Silent Hill's* overbearing dread, and as we forge headlong into the next gen, the increased audiovisual potential of new technology will only help designers establish their chosen tone. Why the sudden interest in mood, you ask? Blame *The Darkness;* it's positively dripping in the stuff.

Fuelled by an opening act that puts hopeless tutorial establishers to shame, Starbreeze's comic book adap is an exhaustive exercise in establishing atmosphere. Players are forcibly thrust into the eyes and ears of mafia hit man Jackie Estacado in the middle of a thrilling police chase. Lessons learned on *Riddick* are evident: its semi-interactivity conjures memories of those humbling strides into Butcher Bay's minimum security prison complex, but any notion of Starbreeze repeating its favourite trick are shattered when Estacado whips out a 12 gauge and a serious vendetta. As the car swings wildly through traffic and around bends, Jackie peppers the pursuing squad cars with buckshot, fending off the Five-0 until the scene's explosive finale. Simply put: wow. Sure beats 'X to jump'.

After the smoke and dust have gone, *The Darkness* settles down into its groove – a high-concept FPS powered by an immense engine, a fantastic premise and a heady dose of atmosphere. As issue 44's 'first look' explained, Estacado gains the powers of the eponymous Darkness on his 21st birthday – after the game's first scene – and suddenly his stock as a hit man increases exponentially. Agent 47's demonic arm and power to control the minions of hell were conspicuously absent, so, by the law of comic book logic, Jackie Estacado is now gaming's number-one assassin. Handy, as taking down an entire crime family is never the easiest of tasks.

So, revenge is the dish of the day in *The Darkness*. After Estacado's adopted uncle, Frankie Ferchetti, murders Jenny – a childhood friend of Jackie's – and sends him a videotape of the ghastly act, family ties are shredded, and the game's premise is established. It's you versus the mob, with the powers of The Darkness in tow. And what powers. Whenever players are shrouded by darkness (lower case) then The Darkness (upper case) comes into effect. Comic book lore tells us that those who hold the powers of The Darkness can summon anything their imagination can muster, as long as it's under the blanket of night. Should it come into contact with the light, then it will crumble to dust. Perfect videogame set up – instead of eliminating light sources to hide Sam Fisher style, you'll be clouding the environment in black just to have your wicked way.

Estacado's juiciest powers are still under wraps for the next round of pre-release hype, but the raw might of the Demon Arm saw cars hurled around like Twiglets at a dinner party. Darklings – Estacado's malevolent miniature companions – provide black comic relief, and when all else fails, our antihero is still a dab hand with twinned pistols. Not too dissimilar from 47, after all…

"THIS COMIC BOOK ADAP IS AN EXHAUSTIVE EXERCISE IN ESTABLISHING ATMOSPHERE"

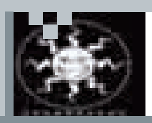
THE WAY OF THE GUN

A first for the genre, *The Darkness*' 'hand' – the FPS player's point of reference – reacts contextually to its surroundings. "If you go up to this crate he moves his hands up above the crate, just to get a clear line of fire on whatever the player's looking at," explains lead designer Jens Andersson at the Leipzig convention. It's an immersive trick which is likely to pop up in future shooters, not unlike *Halo's* energy bar. With innovations like in-game TVs showing movies, *The Darkness* will be anything but a 'generic FPS'.





Mike Patton of Faith No More fame will voice The Darkness itself.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Starbreeze merged with O3 games five years ago and has gone on to achieve success in console development, highlighted by the critically lauded *The Chronicles Of Riddick* in 2004. With *The Darkness*, the Swedish development studio has the potential to usurp DICE as the country's premiere studio.

HISTORY

- **THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK** 2004 [Multi]
- **KNIGHTS OF THE TEMPLE** 2004 [Multi]
- **ENCLAVE** 2002 [Multi]



The Demon Arm in action, tossing cars around as if they were made of marshmallow.





> "FIGHT YOUR WAY THROUGH THE DARK AND SEEDY UNDERBELLY OF NEW YORK CITY AS WELL AS THE ETHEREAL REALM OF THE DARKNESS"
>
> *2K GAMES PRESS RELEASE*

There once was an ugly Darkling all spindly and green and sick.

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007

WITH VISUALS THIS GOOD, YOU HAVE TO BE TOLD IT'S NOT REAL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation3, Xbox 360, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway Games
DEVELOPER: Epic Games
RELEASE: 30 March 2007
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (2+ Online)

CONCEPT

■ This genre-defining gladiatorial FPS classic moves onto next-gen consoles with a facelift and a new engine.

PS3 The daddy of deathmatch champions has been an enormous crowd-pleasing PC multi-player for almost a decade with its success translating briefly to console under an assumed name. *Unreal Tournament 2007* will be the fourth game of the series and marks its next-gen debut on PS3 and 360. Naturally, the game was well received at E3, but having thrived over the last eight years, you'd expect the big fan base to keep it buoyant.

Driving *UT's* success is its bespoke Unreal graphics engine. Its newest endeavour, the Unreal Engine 3, will be powering the visuals in *Unreal Tournament 2007*, and has already been licensed for a number of next-gen projects currently in development, including 10tacle's *Elveon* and Sony Online's secret *DC Comics* MMORPG. Given the information we've received so far regarding *UT2007's* current state, this will be one of the most prominent differences in this next chapter in the series.

It's not all superficial of course. Among the other significant changes that warrant another iteration, Epic has expanded the content and made some practical changes to the controls to account for the new consoles' joypads. The transition from PC to console requires careful mapping of mouse and keyboard control to button, analogue and digital pads – more so among FPSs where split-second timing, reactions and precise movement is required. The original game evolved into a very mobile and gymnastic *UT2003* and *UT2004* that required the kind of sensitivity to user input that could only really be achieved with a mouse. To that end, Epic is returning to the original and, in our opinion best *UT* control system that'll prove more compatible with consoles. Hopefully, this will hold true for the PC version, as we found *UT2004* deathmatch could often descend into an ungainly mess where a newbie could dominate melee through blind luck.

> "EPIC IS REFINING THE SERIES FOR UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2007 RATHER THAN PILING MORE CONTENT ON THE ALREADY HUGE HEAP"

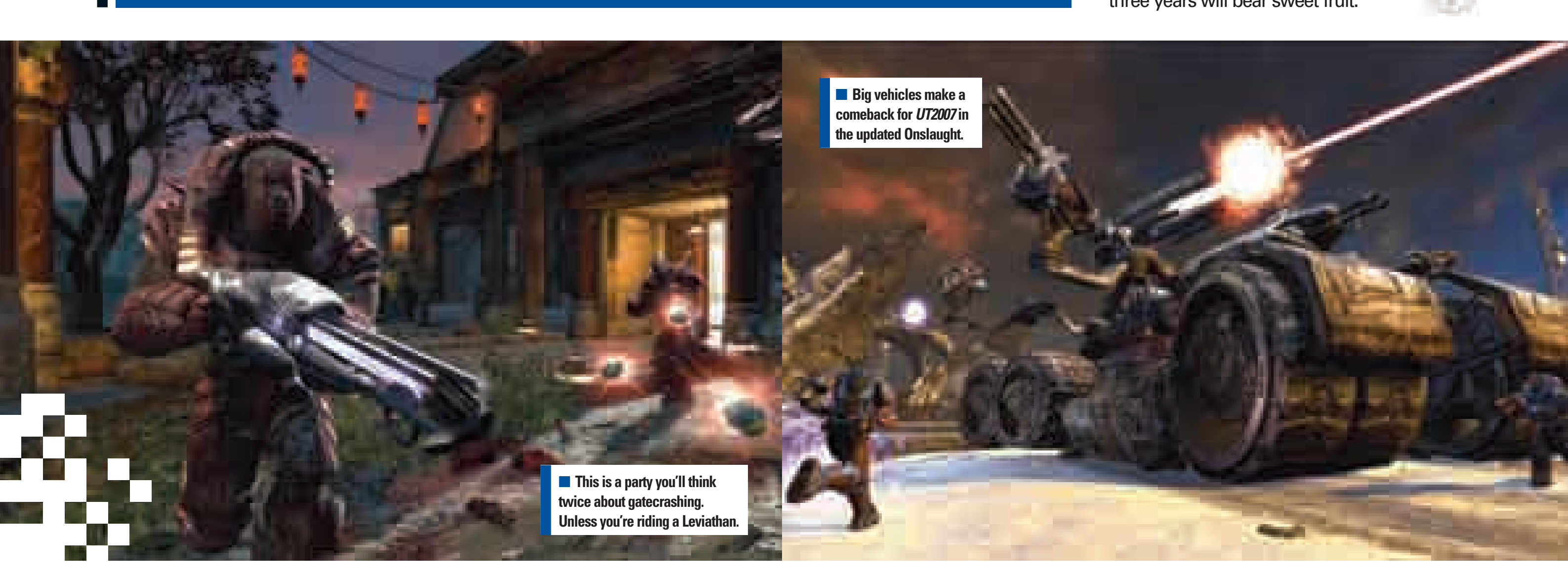
As *UT* has a heavy emphasis on multi-player and online play, Epic's been working on reducing load times between maps by using streaming technology that loads them in the background ready for when the current map is finished. Just as well, as *UT* is also renowned for the diverse range of content on offer, with potentially heavy loading times.

In *UT2004*, Epic included a variety of vehicle types in Onslaught mode, a vehicle-based game which is being updated with an impressive new vehicle roster. For *UT2007*, however, Epic is refining the series rather than piling more content on the already huge heap. The general impression the developer had was that the numerous game types *UT2004* offered had fragmented the multi-player community. Producer Jeff Morris highlighted Epic's concerns in a recent interview, stating, "Instead of having everyone playing 2K4 in the same player pool, they were all off in their own little sub-servers focusing on these game types… We want everything in the game to be very deep and not necessarily go kitchen sink with the product."

If this came from an unknown developer, it could have been misconstrued as a lame excuse to do less work, but Epic has introduced fairly radical and successful changes from one episode of *UT* to the next. We have faith that the last three years will bear sweet fruit.

MARTY McHOVER

One of the more radical new vehicles that Epic has brought to *UT2007* is the hoverboard. Just like the cinema classic *Back To The Future*, players can keep up with the action by using grappling beams to latch onto vehicles and be towed to the appropriate war zone (or away from, for that matter). It's not a tactic you can exploit in battle though – quite the opposite in fact. You have no weapon when mounted on a hoverboard and taking a hit in transit will cause you to tumble, rendering you susceptible to further enemy fire. But at least now you don't have all the legwork of *UT2004* and the frustration of getting to those last few kills in a deathmatch.



■ This is a party you'll think twice about gatecrashing. Unless you're riding a Leviathan.

■ Big vehicles make a comeback for *UT2007* in the updated Onslaught.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ This is the 15th year since Epic was founded as Potomatic Computer Systems by Tim Sweeny, later to become known as Epic MegaGames and then simply Epic Games. Its most successful product is the *Unreal* FPS franchise, the first title of which was developed in 1998. Epic is currently developing the highly anticipated *Gears Of War*.

HISTORY

- **UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2** 2005 [Xbox]
- **UNREAL TOURNAMENT** 1999 [PC]
- **UNREAL** 1998 [PC]

"IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE IT'S BEEN ON A CONSOLE, SO THIS TIME WE WANT TO MAKE SURE WE HAVE SOMETHING SPECIAL"
MARK REIN, EPIC GAMES

■ Tripod thingy. Hanging around until they catch a cold isn't recommended.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MULTI-PLAYER MULTIPLIED

UNREAL TOURNAMENT + UNREAL ENGINE 3 + HOVERBOARDS = UT 2007



■ Hoverboards are handy in a pinch, especially when a sharp exit is required.

CALL OF DUTY 3

■ Get closer to the action and check out some of the all-new weapons, situations and choices.

"YOU'RE NOW GOING TO BE SUDDENLY TOLD THAT YOU HAVE TO MAKE A DECISION UNDER FIRE"

MARCUS IREMONGER, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER ACTIVISION

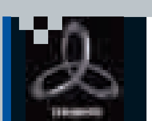
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BODY COUNT CHOICES

SAVING PRIVATE RYAN × THE LONGEST DAY + THE BIG RED ONE = CALL OF DUTY 3



■ The Wii version's worth the drop in graphical quality just to see your mates take this Wiimote stance.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ In 1995, Peter Akemann and Dogan Koslu founded Treyarch, a company that would be acquired by Activision in 2001. The *Call Of Duty 3* project sees the firm continue the series it took over from Infinity Ward, with *Big Red One*. Treyarch has a considerable back catalogue with a few big-budget movie licences since its association with Activision.

HISTORY

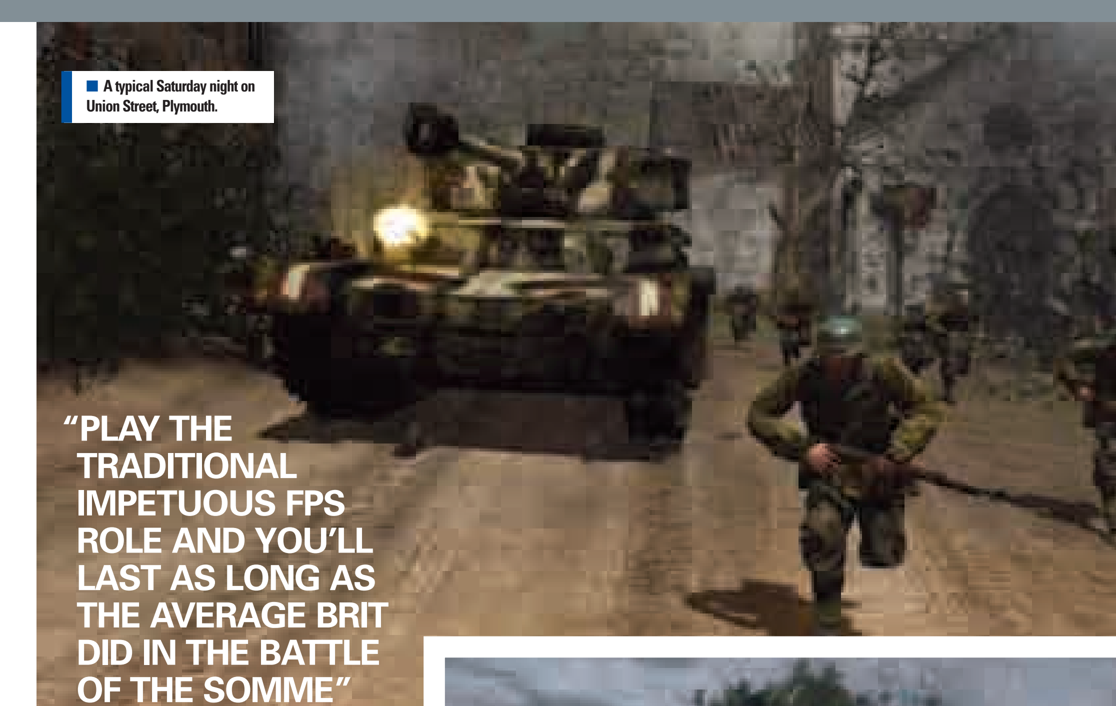
■ **Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One** 2005 [Multi]
■ **Spider-Man** 2002 [Multi]
■ **Die By The Sword** 1998 [PC]

WHAT IF THEY STARTED A WAR AND NO ONE CAME?

Videogames have become THE new medium for teaching history, at least that's the impression Activision gave when we played *Call Of Duty 3*. And there we were, giddy with the excitement of seeing the next gritty WWII game – Activision ostensibly shepherding us through a single level – while in reality we were being given a history lesson we might have excelled at in school.

Sarcasm aside, there's some truth to Activision's apparent ethical stance on *COD3*, which appears to be more than just a marketing vehicle for a potential blockbuster. Within the next decade or so we'll see the last of the WWII veterans pass on and, having worked closely with many of these servicemen, Activision has attempted to bring the gamer as close as anyone can get – with current technology – to reliving the experiences of a WWII soldier in the heat of an historic battle. It's worked so far and *COD3* is set to follow suit.

The second level, called 'The Island', thrusts you onto the front line of the Allied advance from Normandy to Paris. There's limited comfort in the shelter the armoured personnel carrier provides from the relentless rain of projectiles as it moves behind enemy lines. Play the traditional impetuous FPS role and you'll last as long as the average Brit did in the Battle of the Somme. The feeling of sheer vulnerability has been effectively translated with rash actions being mercilessly punished and the reality of the battlefield situation deeply impressed.



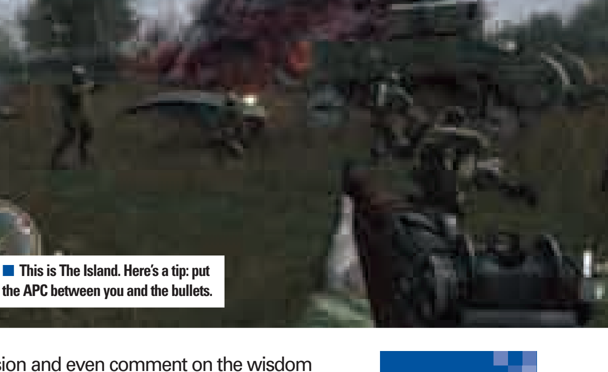
■ A typical Saturday night on Union Street, Plymouth.

"PLAY THE TRADITIONAL IMPETUOUS FPS ROLE AND YOU'LL LAST AS LONG AS THE AVERAGE BRIT DID IN THE BATTLE OF THE SOMME"

Treyarch has capitalised on this overwhelming survival pressure by adding a variety of features that require forethought and time to execute. *COD3*'s Battle Actions include wrestling a weapon from the enemy's hands in melee, and physically rowing a boat while under continuous oppressive enemy fire. While these aren't used as frequently on the multi-player maps we played, melee combat on The Island fired the adrenaline. Going tête-à-tête with a Nazi in a bunker, we were surprised at, and intimidated by the ferocity of the soldier's countenance and the vigour with which we were attacked. Melee combat is a more time-consuming affair, and while we struggled to dispatch the angry Kraut, we were aware that the rest of his squad was bearing down on our position. It seems that the idea behind this extra gameplay detail is to take the player away from the detachment and ease of executing a complex action by pressing a single button, and bring them closer to the stress of combat.

Call Of Duty 3 also sees the introduction of single-player choice routes. This involves your character being given a selection of routes to a single objective – an eventual target or rendezvous point. Your squad will advise you as to the target and consequences of your decision and even comment on the wisdom of your choice en route. The player choice route we played on The Island gave us the option of wading through a deep trench or heading across open ground and a bridge to flank a machine gun nest, each with their own inherent risks. It lends variety to the otherwise linear and scripted direction of the game.

We're told that Activision hopes for a 'holiday season' release. Judging by its current state of completion, that could mean any forthcoming 'holiday'. The exclusive content we were promised was pulled at the last minute due to its instability, and The Island had many graphical and gameplay issues. Not such a minor quibble, but a forgivable one considering the epic instalment that *COD3* is shaping up to be.



■ This is The Island. Here's a tip: put the APC between you and the bullets.

MULTI-CLASS MULTI-PLAYER

While Battle Actions generally aren't used as frequently in multi-player as in single-player, this depends on your choice of class prior to battle. Light infantry will focus on engaging soldiers, while Battle Actions will hold much more significance for explosives experts and medics and with an extended 24 players on the same map at any one time, the chances of being caught by the enemy arming a device or patching your mate up have increased. Multi-occupancy vehicles have spiced up multi-player and include jeeps and motorcycles with sidecar. Finally, tanks are by no means unassailable to a foot soldier and by a method dubbed Tank-mantling, soldiers can mount the target and throw a grenade into the open hatch.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, Wii, 360, (PS3: March)
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Activision
DEVELOPER: Treyarch
RELEASE: Christmas
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: 1 (2-24 Online)

CONCEPT

■ *COD3* continues a line in historically rich WWII games, prizing realism and a degree of historical accuracy above hedonistic FPS gaming.

SID MEIER'S RAILROADS!

SID'S BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD… ALL THE LIVELONG DAY

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
DEVELOPER: Firaxis
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

It may be from the same publisher as *Railroad Tycoon*, but *Railroads!* is quite different from the long-established series, aiming to reinvigorate the sub-genre by making it more accessible.



Any Sid Meier fan will immediately recognise *Railroads!* as a Firaxis game. Wrapped up in the same bright, appealing style and hugely addictive structure as *Pirates!* and *Civilization*, *Railroads!* is an attempted evocation of the draws of real-life model train sets and something of an homage to the *Railroad Tycoon* series. It twins meticulous visual detail with a *Civilization*-esque, accumulation-and-expansion gameplay model that sees a train route linking a village with a nearby town slowly expand into an enormous rail empire that spiders its way across the entirety of a vast map, and aims to be both an addictive real-time strategy exercise and an outlet for would-be hobbyists too lazy to bother designing and building a miniature train landscape in their garages. The vast maps incorporate locations throughout Europe and America and the empire-building scenarios loosely mirror how rail networks really were established across the civilised world in the 19th Century, making millionaires out of the businessmen involved.

Stock trade, competition and resource production all play a part in the economic structure of the game, the aim being to outgrow and out-earn your rival tycoons by building and expanding profitable trade and passenger routes; Meier and Firaxis have borrowed heavily from *Railroad Tycoon* here. The problem with the original *Railroad Tycoon*, though, was that it was laborious and excruciatingly slow-paced. *Railroads!*, on the other hand, dispenses with the tedious business of laying individual pieces of track by using an intuitive drag-and-drop system that automatically suggests appropriate track, bridges and crossings as you haul a piece of railroad across the map – a simple click and it's all there. Each map has a different architectural style with different building types and products to match – France has wineries and cheese producers, Germany has swine farms, and most of America has cattle. Although the design of your miniature rail empire is important, as indicated by the level of visual detail, the emphasis (in objective-structured missions at least) is upon establishing trade and earning revenue as opposed to labouring for half an hour over a 20-mile stretch of rail.

Railroad building is a long-neglected RTS sub-genre, and *Railroads!* breathes new life into it. Our ten-minute session with the game quickly turned into 20, at which point the demonstrator had to politely ask us to leave – it seems that it will be just as easy to sink time into this Meier creation as it was to nip through an entire *Pirates!* career in an evening or lose a week to *Civilization*. The only question is will PC gamers still have an appetite for a railroad-building simulator? When it's as charming as this it's hard to say no.



If you want a model railway set but don't have an attic, Sid Meier may hold the answer to your prayers.

> "RAILROADS! SPORTS THE SAME BRIGHT, APPEALING STYLE AND HUGELY ADDICTIVE STRUCTURE AS PIRATES! AND CIVILIZATION"



A fresh look for a somewhat stagnant sub-genre, *Railroads!* provides plenty of variety.


eMag

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6



Our designer once scored a scissor kick and spent the next week telling us about it.

"PLAYER AI HAS BEEN UPGRADED WITH PLAYERS RUNNING INTELLIGENTLY INTO SPACE WHEN NOT IN POSSESSION OF THE BALL"
KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

Jan Koller is as tall as Peter Crouch, but he'll never be as cool. Mainly because he doesn't look like an alien.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CALCIO FANTASTICO

WINNING ELEVEN 10 + XBOX 360 − EASY = PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Shingo 'Seabass' Tatsuka is a legend. The man gave the world *Winning Eleven*, and for that we should all be eternally grateful. His quest to create footballing perfection on a yearly basis is tireless, endlessly ambitious, and, most importantly, results in fantastic videogames.

HISTORY

■ **WINNING ELEVEN 10** 2006 [PlayStation2]
■ **PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3** 2003 [PlayStation2]
■ **ISS PRO** 1997 [PSOne]





■ There's only ever one outcome when Henry's in this position. Dive.

SEABASS AND HIS BOYS MAKE THEIR NEXT-GEN DEBUT



DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox 360
OTHER FORMATS: Nintendo DS, PC, PlayStation2, PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: KCET
RELEASE: October
GENRE: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4 (TBC Online)

CONCEPT

■ *Pro Evo 6* in high definition, with a few new tricks and a lovely Widescreen mode. You know what to expect.

OLD GEN

■ Obviously the visuals remain in the *PES5* camp, but gameplay is largely the same. Faster than *PES5*, less forgiving than *Winning Eleven 10* and still the best sports title on the market.

That *Pro Evolution Soccer* is popular with the games™ team is no secret. Lunchtimes, evenings and weekends have all been lost to Konami's sporting masterpiece, and the series' debut on a next-gen machine looks set to maintain the tradition. As with every yearly update, the changes between *Pro Evos 6* and *5* are subtle but immediately noticeable to long-time players. However, with the leap to next gen comes a brand new visual overhaul, full widescreen compatibility (at last) and the potential for a truly fulfilling online experience.

Graphically, *Pro Evo 6* is slightly underwhelming. Although an HDR-lit, bump-mapped and hi-def cousin of the PS2 version, it cannot compete with 360's beauty queens. Instead, it appears functional; character models and facial animation are much improved, as is the 3D grass and crowd. Player animation, while still fantastic, feels slightly stilted when compared to the likes of *NBA 2K6*, and KCET's decision to retain eight-player movement over full analogue control is questionable to say the least. This is definitely a next-gen version of a current-gen game, and not the other way around.

Disposing of this negativity is the fact that *PES6* is a prettier, sharper and even more immersive version of one of the greatest games of all time. Time for celebration? You bet. The game plays like a slower and more unforgiving version of *Winning Eleven 10*. So, while you can't ping the ball to feet with unerring accuracy a hundred per cent of the time, the days of referees blowing up for fouls every five seconds are long gone. Players are stronger, tussles between defence and attack are more physical and tangible, and there's a noticeable difference between the pace of Henry and a lumbering centre-back.

> "PLAYERS ARE STRONGER, TUSSLES BETWEEN DEFENCE AND ATTACK ARE MORE PHYSICAL AND TANGIBLE, AND THERE'S A NOTICEABLE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PACE OF HENRY AND A LUMBERING CENTRE-BACK"

Always the series' strongpoint, passing is now magnificent with a genuine ability to mix the short and long ball and a phenomenal amount of flicks, lay-offs, raking through-balls and pinpoint Beckham-style quarterback punts. As a result, *Pro Evo 6* plays more like a Premiership match than *5*'s Series-A-style defensive slogs. Skilful players (both gamers and the on-screen characters) can truly express themselves – countless shimmies, step-overs and clever touches can be accessed with subtle manipulation of the stick, and the likes of Cristiano Ronaldo can be unstoppable at the hands of a master.

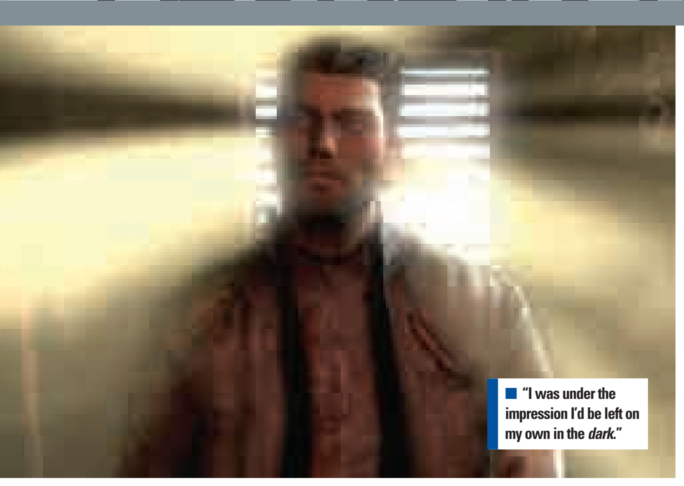
The series has found its way back to the path of righteousness. Exploiting space, not gaps in AI; relying on creativity and vision rather than 'stock goals'; blaming yourself and not the game for mistakes… it's how *Pro Evo* was meant to be. The preview code shows niggles – CPU controller defenders sliding of their own accord, the occasional but still deeply upsetting goalkeeping howler and a few graphical glitches – all of which scream 'fixable' rather than 'game breaking'.

However, with the promise of an Online mode featuring 'no lag' from Seabass himself, there's little reason to expect anything but greatness from *Pro Evolution Soccer 6*. Find out exactly how great next month.

¡OLE!

Pro Evolution Soccer 6 **is a dribbler's dream. Accompanying the usual step-overs, 360s and elasticos are a host of new fakes and shimmies, with varying degrees of difficulty of execution. The hardcore will be most pleased to find the sidestep has returned to the right bumper (formerly 'R2'), and can now be coupled with a slick dragback, but it's the weight-shifting waggles of the stick that have proved most popular. With the ball away from feet, a quick analogue flick through 30 degrees will send players darting left and right of the ball, or quickly shift it between their feet. Cue players trying to recreate their own Maradona/George Weah/Henry moments from now until eternity.**

ALONE IN THE DARK



"I was under the impression I'd be left on my own in the *dark*."

EDWARD CARNBY GETS A NEXT-GEN MAKEOVER AND THE WORLD GOES 'OOOH, NICE'

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS3, 360, PC
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Eden Games
RELEASE: TBA
GENRE: Survival-Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

It's all about dragging classic survival-horror into the next generation, meaning more interaction, bigger stories and, of course, lovely graphics.

PS3

To be frank, *Alone In The Dark* didn't appeal at first. The screens looked sumptuous, sure, but we've been burned before, and given that it's hardly been the most well received series in the past, it was difficult to get enthusiastic about. But as more is revealed about the game, it gets increasingly difficult to restrain excitement. Indeed, in the space of a few months this has gone from just a good looking, next-gen title to the most anticipated survival-horror game.

From the off it's clear that Eden is trying to do something special. You play as yet another incarnation of Edward Carnby, and the majority of the game is played out in third-person, but the game starts off in an altogether different manner. It begins with you simply waking up. You can't see at first, but slowly things become clearer. In order to maintain a decent level of clarity you have to control Ed's blinking by flicking the right analogue stick. The idea of the first section is for you to take in as much of what's going on around you as possible, your surroundings involving all sorts of screaming, thugs, threats and apparent dimension-altering forces ripping through the walls. This all happens before the cliffhanging event of the trailer you will no doubt be aware of, and it's a hell of a way to open a game.

The first-person experience isn't fleeting though; all the in-car action is seen from this perspective. That's right: car. As the game takes place in a fairly realistic, at least in terms of size, Central Park, travelling á là pied is far too slow a way to get about. What's required is four wheels and a leather interior, which shouldn't be too much to ask considering Eden is the brain behind the car porn that is *Test Drive Unlimited*. When Edward's inside the car, he can fiddle with just about everything, from the air-conditioning to the radio and glove box. A particular highlight is when you discover that the inconsiderate owner took the keys, which means ripping off the casing and hot-wiring the car.

You could argue that elements such as this are nothing more than nice touches, but in truth they serve a much more effective purpose. Eden's main focus for *Alone In The Dark* was to create as immersive an experience as it could, and to achieve this the environment has to believable – cars can be hot wired, shovels can be picked up (and swung around using the analogue stick), chairs can be broken, and wooden objects can be set on fire. From what we've seen so far, it's looking like Eden can pat itself on the back; *Alone In The Dark* is offering a refreshingly interactive experience, and it's doing so with copious amounts of style.

Of course, we haven't gone into what to expect from the third-person stuff yet, and that's a lot to do with what we've been able to get our hands on. We expect good things, though, with the investigative elements of what we've seen so far hopefully setting a theme for the rest of the game to follow. The vaunted 'TV series' format should prove interesting as well, giving the intriguing plot room to breathe without suffocating gameplay. In truth, we're finding it hard to say anything bad about the game. Let's hope it stays that way.

"EDEN'S MAIN FOCUS WAS TO CREATE AS IMMERSIVE AN EXPERIENCE AS IT COULD"

MUSICOLOGY

***Halo* is excellent for many reasons, not least for its use of score. It always kicked in at the right time and heightened the tension of a lesser moment considerably. Eden Games looks set to do something similar with *Alone In The Dark*: the music playing a massive part in atmospherics. It's mostly done by a Belgian choir, which should give you an idea of what it might sound like, and is notable for the manner in which it happily flits from a quiet, foreboding tone to creepy satanic hymns. This is handsome stuff.**





Most things in the game will be flammable, which should please people who like to burn things.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Barely ten years old, Eden Games can be forgiven for failing to make an indelible impression on the game industry, but that's slowly starting to change with the next-gen formats proving to be a good home for it. With *Test Drive Unlimited* now doing the rounds, people should soon start paying attention to Eden.

HISTORY

■ **TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED** 2006 [Xbox 360]
■ **KYA: DARK LINEAGE** 2004 [PlayStation2]
■ **V-RALLY 3** 2003 [Multi]

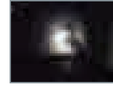




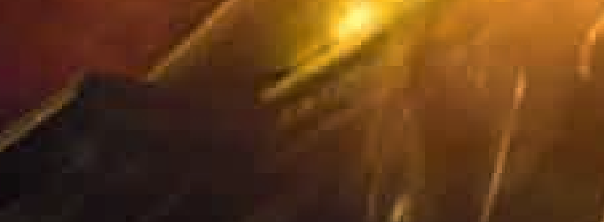
■ It's evident that some painstaking work has gone into the replication of Central Park and its museums. Nice.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THE SUM OF ALL FEARS

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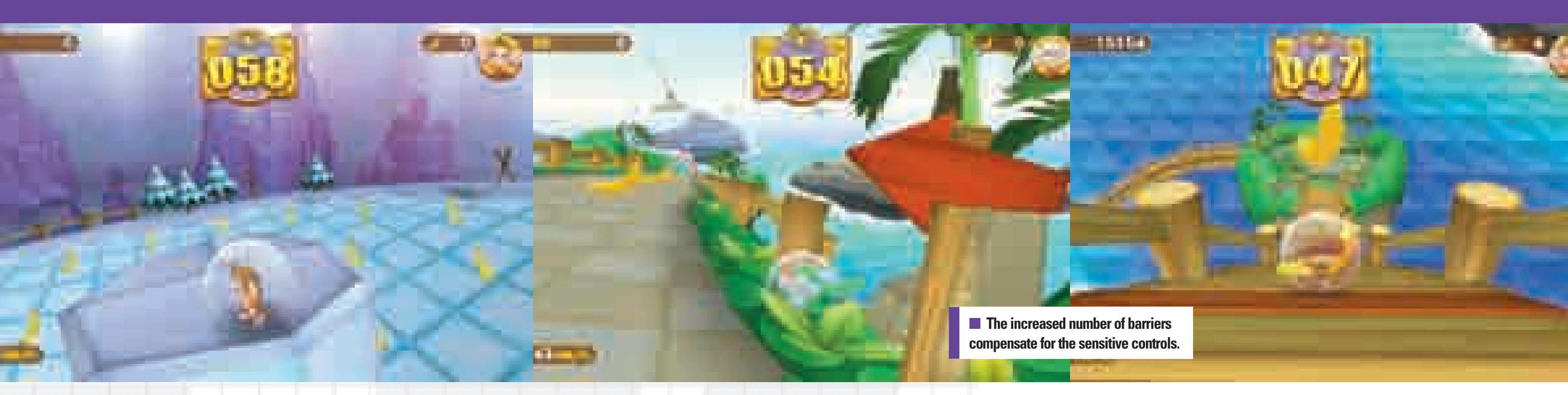
CONDEMNED + DEAD RISING × ALONE IN THE DARK 3 = ALONE IN THE DARK



"IN TRUTH, WE'RE FINDING IT HARD TO SAY ANYTHING BAD ABOUT THE GAME. LET'S HOPE IT STAYS THAT WAY"

■ The game really is going to involve a lot of investigation, and probably a lot of near death as well.

SUPER MONKEY BALL: BANANA BLITZ



The increased number of barriers compensate for the sensitive controls.

LIFE'S ALL ABOUT COMPROMISES

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06
GENRE: Party
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Tilt increasingly complicated floating levels in order to roll a ball containing one monkey, to its goal.

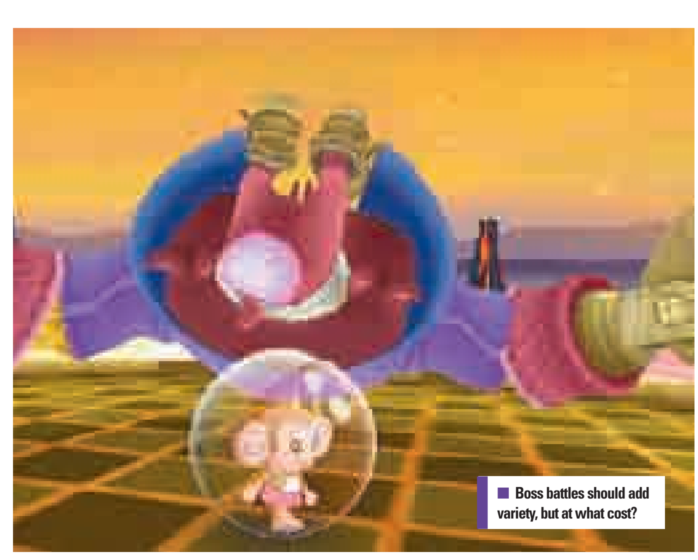
It's five years since *Super Monkey Ball* made its spectacular debut on GameCube in 2001, but since then Sega managed to dilute the game's appeal by creating several sequels and spin-offs that failed to capture the spirit of the original. The majority of those games floundered because their controls simply didn't live up to the standard set by the first Cube title, or because the level designs were overcomplicated to the point where it just became frustrating.

With the upcoming Wii version, Sega is hoping to put right many of the mistakes of the past, but we can't help but wonder whether it's going about it the right way. For starters, the controls have been remapped to the Wii's free-hand remote – a risky move when *Monkey Ball* played perfectly on GameCube's analogue stick, which Wii's stick is modelled on. The current *Banana Blitz* build controls simply by tilting the Wiimote in the direction the ball needs to roll in and while this control scheme is very intuitive, it is also a little too sensitive and will see most monkey ballers crashing into walls and falling from ledges on their first attempt. The controls do become much easier with practice but, as with *Monkey Ball* DS, their over-sensitivity may be the game's undoing when the trickiest levels become available.

Thankfully, Sega seems well aware of the importance of the controls and has already made important changes to the set up. Early versions of *Banana Blitz* used a flick of the Wiimote to make the monkey balls jump. Having realised that such controls are open to accidental movement, however, Sega has changed the configuration so that the jump is activated by pressing the A button or the B trigger. Likewise, the other problem area of over-complicated design has also been deftly tackled. The controversial addition of boss battles and the frantic movements required to beat them can often result in the monkey ball bouncing off into oblivion, but Sega has compromised by ensuring that any damage done to the boss will carry over into each retry.

Such concessions are most welcome, but Sega really needs to tweak the controls further still if *Banana Blitz* is to be as instantly accessible as the GameCube original. Less sensitive controls, a user-definable sensitivity or even the option to use the attachable analogue stick is worth considering before the game's launch this winter.

"OVER-SENSITIVE CONTROLS MAY BE THE GAME'S UNDOING WHEN THE TRICKIEST LEVELS BECOME AVAILABLE"



Boss battles should add variety, but at what cost?



The inclusion of 50 mini-games is a most welcome addition.


eMag



■ This has to be our most anticipated level… sadly unplayable in the demo.

■ All the bells and whistles of next-gen gaming… without the whistles.



WHAT DO WE DO WHEN WE FALL FROM THE HORSE? WE GET BACK ON. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT UBISOFT MONTREAL DID AS IT WENT BACK TO BASICS WITH THE RAINBOW SIX FRANCHISE FOLLOWING THE CRITICAL AND COMMERCIAL FAILURE OF RAINBOW SIX LOCKDOWN. GAMES™ INVESTIGATES…

To understand why *Rainbow Six's* return to form takes place amid the dazzling, unreality of America's biggest casino resort it helps to see the city for yourself. So, with this in mind, **games™** scooped up its one and only sharp suit, a bluffers' guide to poker and a handful of cash before jetting off to Vegas in search of a small fortune and an early playtest of the game in question.

What we found was a place unlike any other on earth: a post-modern pick 'n' mix of the world's greatest monuments – including replicas of the Eiffel Tower, Statue of Liberty, and Sphinx – and millions of people seeking to escape reality for a few days of hedonistic abandon. Yet underneath the superficial glitz and glamour lies a very human core of depression. Many of the city's 1 million residents scrape a living in the thriving casinos and hotels where tourists show as much respect for croupiers as they do cash dispensers. Last-chance gamblers roam the streets begging for a dollar in the vain hope they can win back their lost thousands, while wealthy vacationers turn a blind eye to the hundreds of tramps, hookers and drug dealers littering the Strip.

Yes, Las Vegas has a lot of fun to offer those who can afford it, but that fun comes at a price that affects the poorest, most desperate souls. This is the essence of *Rainbow Six Vegas*: a contrasting world where the luxury and grandeur of the city sit uncomfortably alongside the extreme violence and threat of terrorism.

Rainbow Six Vegas, the fifth full entry in the series and the first to be produced for a next-generation console, has to undo the mistakes the last game made in order for fans of the franchise to regain faith in the series, and the setting of Las Vegas is one key to doing so. The look and feel of the unique city is captured perfectly as the awe-inspiring sights have been meticulously recreated outdoors while the ▷



■ The opening level of Dante's Casino is under construction.

■ Ubisoft Montreal is especially proud of the Theatre level.

■ Rappelling is the new rocket-jump. You heard it here first.

> "FEW MOMENTS FEEL MORE SATISFYING THAN LOBBING A HANDFUL OF GRENADES INTO A ROOM BELOW THEN ABSEILING DOWN TO MOP UP THE ODD SURVIVOR"



indoor locations provide a dazzling backdrop that contrasts the extreme violence and destruction. The visual style that the location brings is refreshing enough to create a renewed interest in the series, but the developer is well aware that it needs more than just a new setting to reinvigorate a flagging franchise.

AFTER THE CRITICAL panning of *Lockdown*, Ubisoft Montreal knew that it had to return to the key elements of its most successful entry, *Rainbow Six 3*, which, in the words of associate producer JF Poirer are tension, tactics, close-quarters battle, and realism. It also knew that the game needed to be more accessible to casual gamers, which is why such emphasis was placed on story – every member of the 150-strong dev team, including programmers, were required to know the narrative inside out. And while the team is obviously reluctant to specify details of the plot, we do know that the way in which that plot is relayed to the player will be one of the most noticeable differences in the franchise's reinvention.

The game seemingly takes a leaf from Ubisoft's other key franchise – *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* – by ditching mission briefings and FMV cut-scenes in favour of a story acquired by the player while the action takes place. A picture-in-picture mode allows Team Rainbow to receive audio and visual mission briefings while exploring Vegas, and additional background information can be acquired by eavesdropping on terrorists and hostages. The method of developing the story, while keeping the action moving, worked wonders for *POP*, but according to Poirer, the 2003 classic did little to influence *Rainbow Six Vegas*. Films and TV series were the main motivation – most notably the mega-hit *24*. "It was a big inspiration for us in terms of the sense of urgency and the fact that so much happens in a short period of time," explains the producer. "These were elements that appealed to us, but we also need to make sure that we differentiate ourselves from the show. We don't want to replicate it, but we were inspired by the series, and there are several elements that are good because they fit the core values." We assume the *24* inspiration was most effective on the core value of tension.

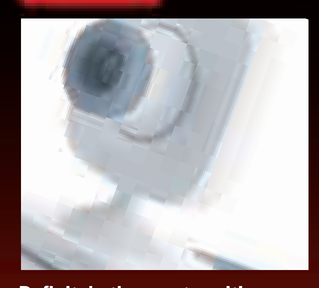
The demo we played took place in an under-construction section of *Rainbow Six's* fictional yet familiar casino, and climaxed in a hostage situation that easily ended in disaster for many of the journalists at the presentation. With three terrorists bickering over whether or not to kill their hostage, the clock was ticking and players had to make snap decisions on how to resolve the situation. Act rashly and the terrorists may assassinate a young woman before a rescue is possible, but spend too long observing the situation and she may be murdered in cold blood anyway. Knowing the right time to strike is imperative and the unpredictable nature of human characters makes the tension almost unbearable at times like these.

IT'S THE VALUE of tactics and close-quarters combat that make up the bulk of gameplay, and Ubisoft has implemented a number of changes and additions in this department to improve the playability of every situation. One of the most effective is the ability to automatically switch from first-person to third-person at certain moments. This feature often comes into play when the player leans against a wall or obstacle to take cover and observe the enemy. Previous iterations of *Rainbow* allowed the player to peek around corners in first-person, but the new viewpoint allows greater visibility and further opportunity to monitor the terrorists' behaviour and conversations in order to predict what they will do next. It's not that innovative a change, as a handful of FPS games have previously adopted the feature, but it's great to see Ubisoft making use of such abilities to improve gameplay.

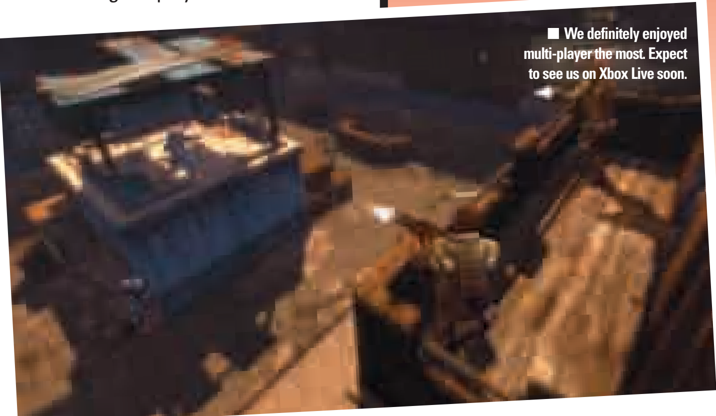
Poirer insists that playing *Vegas* requires a greater use of tactics than earlier games. New players not accustomed to taking their time, will suffer if they don't pause to assess a situation and plan the combat by communicating with their team. Key to this strategy are the new gizmos and gadgets at Team Rainbow's disposal. Snake Cam is one of two new features that Poirer is especially proud of. The device can be slipped under doorways to observe rooms and detect threats without actually entering. Also, a quick tap of the back button when aiming at a terrorist will 'tag' him so that one of your two team-mates will prioritise the kill of that assailant as soon as the door is opened. Of course, with only two team-mates available, the player must carefully choose which terrorists to tag in a crowded room.

Similarly the ability to rappel down the side of the casino allows oblivious terrorists to be tagged and 'neutralised' from outside the windows before the team swings back into the building, shattering the glass. This ability is sure to become *Rainbow Six Vegas'* trademark, and one that players will get a rush from pulling off successfully. Sadly, the ability can only be used at pre-determined locations throughout the maps. Some gamers may be frustrated that the option is only available intermittently, but Poirer remains confident that this was the right design: "It's not a sandbox, we're leading the player at some ▷

PERIPHERAL VISION



Definitely the most exciting and potentially controversial addition to *Rainbow Six Vegas* is its ability to make use of Microsoft's Xbox Live vision camera. The dev team has pulled out all the stops to ensure the camera is used to its fullest and we believe that it is the use of this peripheral that separates *Rainbow Six Vegas* from games of the previous generation. Although Microsoft prevents us from showing any images of the work-in-progress technology, we're pleased to report that, even in its current state of development, the option to scan the player's face onto an in-game character works fantastically. Requiring only two photos of the face, the game took around five minutes to render a full 3D model of the gamer in eerily accurate detail. Although the process was slow, the team promises that the final version will be much quicker, with render times of seconds rather than minutes suggested. The comprehensive customisation options from the Character Create mode should also be applicable to any scanned imagery so it will also be possible to add scars, camo paint and apparel for those who've always wanted to see themselves as a battle-hardened soldier complete with war-wounds.



■ We definitely enjoyed multi-player the most. Expect to see us on Xbox Live soon.



■ Many of the characters look exceptionally good in close up.

■ The volume of customisation options is staggering.

> "WE RUN THE RISK OF TOUCHING PEOPLE IN A WAY THAT MIGHT BE UNPLEASANT FOR THEM"
> PHILLIPE THÉRIEN, RAINBOW SIX VEGAS MULTI-PLAYER CO-ORDINATOR

SMALLER STAKES

Unveiled during our trip, the PSP version of *Rainbow Six Vegas* came as a refreshing surprise as Ubisoft announced that the game would not be a straight port of the console version, but would in fact be tailored to the portable in order to squeeze the best possible gameplay from the handheld. The story follows a different path to the 360 and PS3 iterations, with a different Rainbow team, original, purpose-built locations and a plot that complements the narrative of its big brothers.

The portable version is being developed by Ubisoft's newly formed handheld specialist Quebec Studios. Creative director Daniel Bérubé led the development. "We're aware that PSP players will play on the bus and that while the bus is moving they're being shook around, so that's why the controls are more forgiving and the AI less strict. Our gameplay is not one-shot-one-kill, for example." With the chance to play both the PSP and 360 versions in the same day, we could see that Bérubé's was correct. The game is much more forgiving but retains many of the tactical elements of the console versions so, for those who find the 'bigger' versions too challenging, the PSP edition offers a gentler alternative.

Worries that the PSP's limited controls would affect gameplay were soon swept aside when we sat down to play the game. Similar to many N64 games of old, movement is controlled by the analogue stick while the 'look' controls are mapped to the face buttons. The control scheme works intuitively although Bérubé promised that the final version would feature other control methods for those who might not be satisfied with the defaults.

The game features ad-hoc and infrastructure multi-player that could, depending on the release date, make it the first PSP FPS to be playable over the net. Up to six-player deathmatches are promised across several multi-player maps, including the casino itself and a handful of classic maps from previous *Rainbow Six* games.

Since Quebec Studios specialises in handhelds, we asked if a DS version was in the works. Bérubé said: "I can't pronounce myself on that". Sounds to us like a DS version is a possibility, and with the genre already a proven quantity on the portable, and Studio Quebec's refreshing approach to handhelds, we'd love to see such a game.

points to make sure he follows the story, but you're often put in a position where you can approach the situation differently," he explains with reference to the game's core values.

The overall vision is that the player has control over the smallest choices so the emphasis is on the finer points of each encounter. This adds tactical depth rather than leaving the player free to aimlessly wander, which would go against the team's goal of keeping the action moving.

Single-player is definitely shaping up to be one of the most focused and tense in the history of *Rainbow*, but having spent a good few hours enjoying some of the multi-player maps on offer, **games™** predicts that the game's November launch will see more people logging on to XBL than enjoying the game by themselves.

Rainbow Six 3 was one of the first Xbox titles to capture the spirit of what Live had to offer. All who sampled the delights of the multi-player were rapt night after night by a most rewarding tactical online game. In fact, many ignored the lacklustre *Lockdown* and even *Halo 2* in favour of *RS3*. Now Ubisoft is hoping to reclaim the multi-player crown for the new generation of consoles with what is quite possibly its strongest offering yet.

AS IS TO be expected, the core gameplay of Story mode translates well to the multi-player game. Up to 16 players can put their new skills to the test through Microsoft's Matchmaking service, which pits players against similarly skilled opponents. In practice, this means that the most tactical players will find like-minded allies and enemies who take the game just as seriously as themselves, whereas those who prefer a more gung-ho approach will be able to compete without fear of being completely destroyed before they've even seen their foe.

The levels we played were of course designed to encourage tactical play. Most consisted of many small rooms and floors so that the Snake Cam and rappelling abilities could be put to use. The pace of the matches didn't really lend itself to the use of the Snake Cam (it seems most game journalists fall into the gung-ho category), but few moments in the playtest felt more satisfying than lobbing a handful of grenades into a room below and then abseiling down as a team to mop up the odd survivor.

Lead multi-player co-ordinator and weapons designer Phillipe Thérien is especially proud of the multi-player, but, having worked on both sides of the game, he's aware that too many games focus on the multi-player at the expense of the single-player experience or vice versa. "Some games develop a niche where they are uniquely single-player or solely multi-player," says Thérien, "I think that all games should have a single-player that mixes well with the multi-player. An example of that is that you can customise a character and play through the single-player with your multi-player avatar. So it's something we're trying to do a lot better now and I think we actually pulled it off".

Ubisoft Montreal has managed to cross-pollinate the single and multi-player modes in many ways. As well as the aforementioned option, it is possible to co-operatively play the entire Story mode over Xbox Live, in split screen or through a system link. Using the Xbox Live vision camera, the player can also scan their face into the game and map it onto a 3D head to be used in either mode.

As the first full game to make use of the vision cam, *Vegas* could put itself in the firing line of the current media obsession with violent games. Six years ago Nintendo and Rare attempted a similar feature with *Perfect Dark* on N64, but it was pulled at the last minute due to worries that the world just wasn't ready for such controversial technology.

Now, with *Rainbow Six Vegas* allowing millions to shoot at realistic images of each other in recreations of real-world environments, we asked Thérien why he thought this was the right time to implement such a feature. "I think that the videogame industry as a whole has matured,' he suggested, "We're getting much closer to the movie industry and I'm finding that the things that we can do now are becoming much more acceptable. At the same time, people have a tendency to get touchy about what we do because the realism is just up there. The powerful consoles are a blessing and a curse as you can give people a realistic experience but at the same time run the risk of touching them in a way that might be unpleasant for them. The message is that it's just a game. It's entertainment. So if you find it entertaining then go for it. If it's something that's unpleasant for you then play something else. We don't set out to offend anyone or give them the tools to be really violent. All we want people to do is have a good time."

A good time is definitely what **games™** had and, like our initial impressions of Vegas, we'd rather focus on the positive nature of this new *Rainbow Six* than dwell on the potentially disturbing elements. And this is why we so eagerly anticipate the release of the finished game as, from our time with the preview code, *Rainbow Six Vegas* is set to topple the might of *Rainbow Six 3* to become the most loved title in the series both online and offline.



THE POWER OF THREE

Although *Rainbow Six Vegas* is a multiformat videogame, during our trip we were only shown the Xbox 360 and PSP versions. Little is known of the PlayStation3 edition, but a chat with the Ubisoft development team shed a little light on the matter. "All I'm able to say is that we're looking to ship on PS3 as well but we're not having specific content," revealed Poirer. "We're developing with 360 as our main development platform and porting to PS3 means that there's less memory available for us to use, but we're trying to minimise any drop in quality, that's for sure." Such comments suggest that the gap in performance between PlayStation3 and Xbox 360 is nowhere near as powerful as some would like us to believe and that the console may even be less able than Microsoft's. It's an intriguing prospect, but we'll reserve judgement until the final code is in our hands.

Since PlayStation3 will not feature face-mapping technology like the 360 version, we also asked the team if the PS3 *Vegas* would have any similar little tricks up its sleeve. On the subject of PS3's motion controller, Poirer said: "There are no plans [to make use of the tilt function] yet, but that would be the producer's decision. I will say that I am not sure, for now." Likewise, Bérubé was similarly dismissive of plans to link the PSP version to the PS3 port, "Right now there are no plans. This is the first online, multi-player game on PSP for Ubisoft, and we have put all our effort into making that happen. We felt this was more interesting for the players than linking to the PS3".

So there we have it. Not only will PS3 owners now have to wait until March for their first PAL games but, in this case at least, it's unlikely that there'll be anything to make the PlayStation version worth waiting for.

CANIS CANEM EDIT

■ Players can ride both bicycles and a skateboard to speed around town.

"AS A TROUBLESOME SCHOOLBOY, YOU'LL LAUGH AND CRINGE AS YOU STAND UP TO BULLIES, GET PICKED ON BY TEACHERS, AND PLAY PRANKS ON MALICIOUS KIDS"
SAM HOUSER, ROCKSTAR

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BULLY TACTICS

GTA × SKOOL DAZE + GRANGE HILL = CANIS CANEM EDIT



■ The sense of school life is incredibly evocative. Typical Rockstar charm.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ *Canis Canem Edit* is Rockstar Vancouver's first game under the Rockstar label, and has courted more than its fair share of controversy since its announcement. The studio previously went under the name Barking Dog when it was responsible for the *Treasure Planet* game, among others.

HISTORY

■ **CANIS CANEM EDIT** 2006 [Multi]
■ **TREASURE PLANET: BATTLE AT PROCYON** 2002 [PC]
■ **HOMEWORLD: CATACLYSM** 2000 [PC]

JACK THOMPSON'S FAVOURITE VIDEOGAME

PS2 ***Canis Canem Edit* may be the most misinterpreted videogame in history.** From the minute Rockstar announced the game's original and somewhat controversial title, *Bully*, the right-wing media had a field day. Obviously, Jack Thompson took it upon himself to chastise a game about which he knew nothing, causing a media whirlwind that's damned the game as 'evil' before anyone's seen anything more than a screenshot.

Now going by the name *Canis Canum Edit* – Latin for 'Dog Eat Dog' – this is probably the least controversial title in Rockstar's recent history… aside from *Table Tennis*, of course. Far more saintly than *San Andreas*, with nowhere near the violence of *Manhunt* or *The Warriors*, *Canis Canem Edit* is a game all about mischief. Labelled an 'interactive comedy', the title is Rockstar's attempt to recapture the spirit of high-school television and film, from *Grange Hill* to *Napoleon Dynamite*, and from our brief hands on it would seem it has succeeded.

Lead character Jimmy Hopkins, after being sent to the exclusive but dangerous Bullworth Academy, has the unenviable task of working his way up through the school's social structure by playing the cliques off against one another and standing up for himself by any means necessary. He's a tough kid, undoubtedly, but he's far from being the 'bully' that many expected. In fact, Jimmy has a strong sense of decency and justice, so while you will be fighting kids, upsetting teachers and harassing students left, right and centre during the game's missions, it's always with just cause. For example, one mission saw Jimmy racing off to the far reaches of campus to protect the 'nerds' from being beaten up by the 'bullies'. There's no blood, no physical damage, no death and definitely no knives.

That's not to say *Canis Canem Edit* is without its share of 'media alert' moments, but it's definitely more in the *Porky's* camp than *GTA* nihilistic ultra-violence. Sneaking into girls' dorms, giving prefects a kick in the nuts, grabbing kids for atomic wedgies… all present and correct. It's hardly *Manhunt*. In fact, *Canis Canem Edit* is just nostalgic fun. The game's cliques are typical high-school comedy stereotypes, and all brilliantly realised from the Zack Morris-style preppies in their expensive jumpers to the dropouts that can be found slacking in the town. The overall effect and scholastic atmosphere sets this apart from all other open-world games. Trust Rockstar to do something interesting with the *GTA* template.

However, it's that *GTA* template that may prove *CCE*'s ultimate downfall. While the open-world elements are fantastic, with daft errands to run for students, a 'trouble' meter replacing wanted stars and the freedom to behave as well or as badly as you wish, the missions we experienced were, sadly, overfamiliar. After activating a cut-scene, tasks were of the 'fetch and carry' variety, and were nowhere near as entertaining as simply hanging out in the school. Without doubt, more time spent in the game's expansive town (the school makes up one quarter of the play area) will lead to many more inspiring moments. Our brief urban recce on Jimmy's skateboard, which you can access at any time, revealed shops, hairdressers and many an opportunity for mischief.

Canis Canem Edit is a far more interesting, intelligent and amusing piece of work than many had given it credit for, and if the overall standard of the missions improves, then Rockstar will be onto yet another winner. It just shows that you shouldn't judge a schoolbook by its cover. Are you listening at the back, Mr Thompson?



"ROCKSTAR'S ATTEMPT TO RECAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF HIGH-SCHOOL TELEVISION AND FILM, FROM GRANGE HILL TO NAPOLEON DYNAMITE"

■ Most of the scenery is destructible – perfect for cricket practice.

SCHOOL DAZE

As *CCE* is set in a school, young Jimmy will have to attend classes from time to time. Ranging from maths to art, the five subjects each have five levels of difficulty, and all involve playing a brief mini-game. They're short and sweet, and actually benefit your scholastic career. Improve Jimmy's art grade, and he'll be a hit with the ladies. Increase his English skill, however, and he'll have better communicative abilities – very useful for talking your way out of trouble. We only managed chemistry and art during our few days at Bullworth Academy, which led to a rhythm-action mini-game and a Snake homage respectively. No prizes for guessing what that entails.

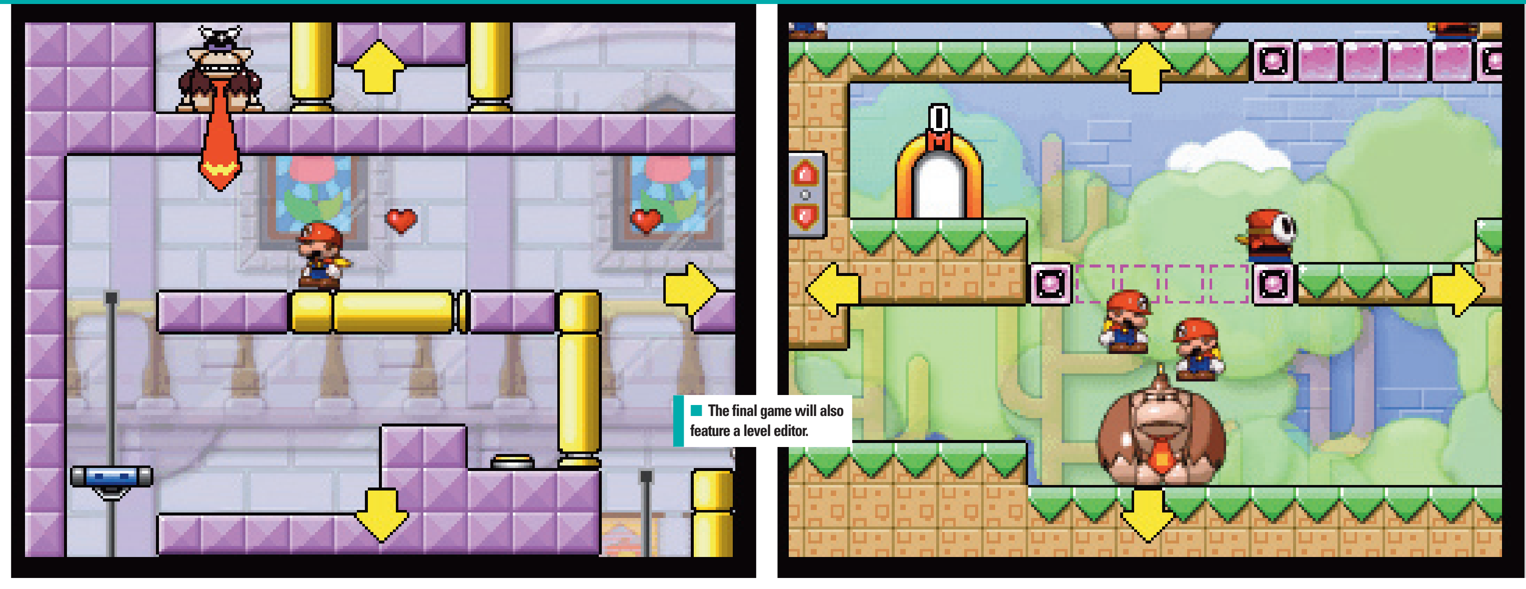
DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Rockstar
DEVELOPER: Rockstar Vancouver
RELEASE: October
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ You play Wayne Rooney look-a-like Jimmy Hopkins, a 15 year old who must traverse the social structure of Bullworth Academy, a school for delinquents.

MARIO VS DONKEY KONG 2: MARCH OF THE MINIS



The final game will also feature a level editor.

AND IN THE RED CORNER: ONE TIN TOY WEIGHING JUST 16 OUNCES

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo DS
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBA (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Guide an army of toy Marios through each level's obstacles and pitfalls, with the ultimate goal of defeating Donkey Kong (again) and rescuing Pauline.

***Mario Vs Donkey Kong* on the Game Boy Advance built upon the foundations of the original *Donkey Kong* arcade game and Game Boy's *Donkey Kong '94* to create a platform game that leant as much toward solving intricate maze-like structures as it did jumping over things.** *March Of The Minis* takes this process to the next step by transferring all the controls to the touch screen and replacing the fully controllable Mario with a troop of automated Mario toys. The transformation from platform game to puzzler is now complete.

With direct character control removed from the game, the style of play has undergone a radical change that belies the 'lazy sequel' label that the title suggests. *March Of The Minis* is as far removed from the traditional *Donkey Kong* formula as possible and now actually plays much more like *Lemmings*. The Minis steadily move around the stage by themselves, turning if they hit a wall and blindly marching to their doom if left to roam into a hazard or over a ledge. The stylus controls are used to manipulate each individual Mini: flick one upwards to make it jump and if it hits an item, say, a hammer, then it will automatically grab it and hammer away wherever it wanders. The level itself can then be manipulated with the stylus to guide the Minis to where they're required.

As the levels progress, enemies will appear and can be avoided through careful guidance of the Minis, or destroyed with a hammer. If a Mini comes into contact with an enemy or a boss toy then they'll perish, reducing the toy army by one. At least a single Mini must reach the level's exit to move on to the next, but it is recommended that players guide as many of them to the end as possible as huge bonuses can be achieved for moving several through an exit at once or by ensuring that a special Mini makes it to the end.

Stylus control works intuitively and precisely and its ability to quickly interact with the Minis becomes essential as the levels become more complex and several Minis must be manipulated at once. The only element of the design that doesn't immediately feel natural is the way that the entire level cannot be seen and must be scrolled using two on-screen arrows. We would have liked Nintendo to add a map or radar to the top screen so that the Minis' locations could be tracked at all times. Aside from this minor oversight, however, Nintendo has built a solid puzzle system that's both fun and challenging. Consequently, the game shows a lot of promise but will live or die by its level design. If the final release has a well-pitched difficulty curve with enough incentive to soldier on, then it could become an essential puzzle game.





Custom levels can be shared using Nintendo Wi-Fi connection.

> "THIS IS FAR REMOVED FROM THE DONKEY KONG FORMULA AND PLAYS MUCH MORE LIKE LEMMINGS"


eMag

RED STEEL



The bullet time function can be a great help when facing multiple enemies.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

EVERYBODY PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR

DUCK HUNT + YAKUZA + A STEADY HAND = RED STEEL

With contemporary Japan as a backdrop, we can expect paper houses and the overuse of neon.

"PUTS PLAYERS DIRECTLY INTO THE ACTION-PACKED FIRST-PERSON EXPERIENCE WITH THE WEAPON IN THEIR HAND. LITERALLY"

UBISOFT PRESS RELEASE

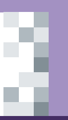


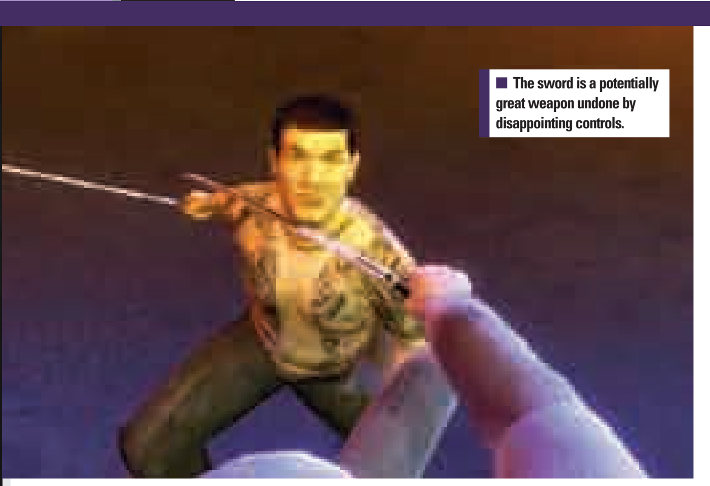
DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Ubisoft Paris is the only developer to build an FPS for Nintendo Wii from the ground up. While others can blame the technology, Ubisoft Paris cannot; the *Ghost Recon* and *Rayman* franchises suggest the firm is as comfortable with novelty as it is with ballistics.

HISTORY

■ **GHOST RECON ADVANCED WARFIGHTER** 2006 [Multi]
■ **KING KONG** 2005 [Multi]
■ **RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC** 2003 [Multi]





■ The sword is a potentially great weapon undone by disappointing controls.



■ We had a chance to use the pistol, the shotgun and the uzi. Guess which was our favourite.

CAN YOU FEEL THE FORCE?

DETAILS

FORMAT: Nintendo Wii
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06 (TBC)
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ After your girlfriend is kidnapped and her gang boss father murdered, you must travel to Japan and exact revenge. If you can work the controller, that is…

Even so close to launch Nintendo's Wii remains shrouded in mystery. The stream of rumours from 'anonymous sources' seems to be growing in ferocity, aggravated by the company's stubborn silence over the facts. The latest nugget of conjecture to capture the imagination is the claim that Nintendo is deliberately running Wii games at reduced power. When the machine is launched, the whole world will be stunned by the leap in graphical quality. This is convenient, particularly since all negative criticism concerning the console seems to have been targeted at the visuals.

It certainly smacks of wishful thinking from fanboys, but our recent brush with Ubisoft's *Red Steel* has made us think twice. We accepted long ago that graphics would be the domain of Microsoft and Sony, but so underwhelmed were we by the look of *Red Steel* that our fingers are firmly crossed for this piece of hearsay to be gospel truth. Of course, we only focus on the graphics because Wii's defining characteristic is that each game will be controlled using motion sensors. Picturing implementation of motion in a game like Wii Sports is simple, translate that to a genre like FPS and things become difficult. Questions of sensitivity, buttons and whether or not anyone will want to stand with their arms in the air for hours on end – not a problem for Wii Sports, but a big one for genres that require lengthy play sessions – spring immediately to mind. One thing is certain: *Red Steel* has a mountain to climb.

The level we played started in a traditional Japanese house and then jumped to a garish casino; a jarring switch, though we were reminded that such details are likely to change before launch. There are two basic weapons, gun and sword, with distinct control systems for each. The left handset controlled your character's movement, while a good, hard shake performed context-specific actions like opening doors. The right handset is devoted to aiming and shooting – a tap of the A button zooms in while holding it down enters you into a bullet-time function. With the action at a crawl, hit points appear on the enemies' hands, allowing you to disarm them with a well-placed bullet.

The control method is difficult to acclimatise to, but that's a universal concern and everyone adjusted before too long. The key to the gunplay seemed to be movement: a tiny flick of the wrist took the crosshairs from one side of the screen to the other, making subtle, steady hands a requirement for success. After ten minutes, though, we were weaving between slot machines and dispatching enemies with relative ease.

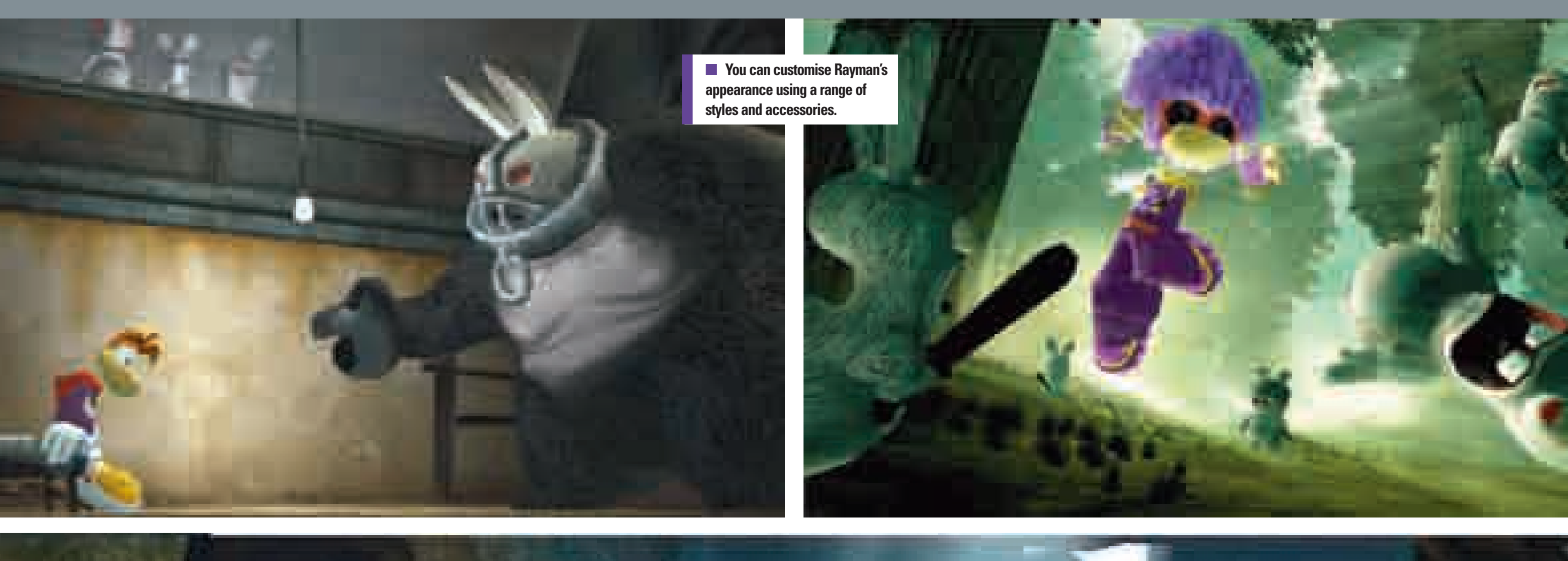
A major sticking point was swordplay. The encounters we witnessed felt separate to the action in the main game, with the differing control method only serving to underline this. In direct opposition to a gun, swords require large movements, and the battles seemed stilted, with a distinct my turn/your turn dynamic. Ubisoft assured us that it was a work in progress, and the controls that day were unlikely to be those in the finished game. It seemed apt that developers for this mystery machine should themselves still be in the dark. At least *Red Steel* shows light at the end of the tunnel.

> "IMPLEMENTATION OF MOTION IN A GAME LIKE Wii SPORTS IS SIMPLE, TRANSLATE THAT TO AN FPS AND THINGS BECOME DIFFICULT"

THE WiiMOTE IS MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD

Our overall impression of *Red Steel* was certainly positive although the least convincing facet of the experience was the sword. If there's a way of shoehorning a samurai in somewhere then we're all for it, but at the moment *Red Steel*'s katana skills are sorely lacking. Ubisoft is working hard on the issue and intends to devise a system where the player's specific movements are exactly translated on screen. Whether this is possible is for Ubisoft to know and for us to find out, but it beats the hell out of the clunky left-hand parry, right-hand attack system used at present.

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS



■ You can customise Rayman's appearance using a range of styles and accessories.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

MONSTER RAVING LOONY

RAYMAN + MARIO PARTY + AN OPEN MIND = RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

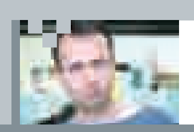
■ There will be a range of animals and creatures for Rayman to ride on in the game.

"RAYMAN WILL BE EASY TO PICK UP AND PLAY, AND PACKED WITH A LOT OF HUMOUR AND IMMERSIVE ACTION"

MICHEL ANCEL, UBISOFT

RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS

NINTENDO Wii/MULTIFORMAT



DESIGNER PROFILE

■ If one person can be called the originator of *Rayman* it is renowned French game developer Michel Ancel. Producer of the original game for the Atari Jaguar and Sony PlayStation, Ancel later repeated its success with the critically admired *Beyond Good & Evil* and the commercially sound licence for *Peter Jackson's King Kong*.

HISTORY

- KING KONG 2005 [Multi]
- BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2003 [Multi]
- RAYMAN 1995 [Multi]

RABBITS…? WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE RABBITS?



FORMAT: Wii, PC, DS, GBA, 360, PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: France
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q4 '06 TBC
GENRE: Action-Adventure
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

■ Earth is being taken over by rabbits, and Rayman must trawl through ever more zany and inventive means of vanquishing his foes to save the planet and, more importantly, his lady.

With even a scrap of luck, by the beginning of next year the relative strengths of Nintendo's Wii will be clear. Right now, however, the hyperbole is at such a pitch that it's becoming difficult to marry our limited playing time with the rumour, in order to form an accurate impression of just how 'revolutionary' The-Console-Formerly-Known-As-Revolution is going to be.

The challenge for developers will be to adapt the technology for genres that traditionally don't need it. FPSs, RPGs, strategy games – they've all matured in ways that require extended play and complex controls. *Rayman Raving Rabbids* is typical of the 'other' type of Wii game: those titles that don't seem exciting at first glance, but come alive when combined with Nintendo's motion-control system.

Using the *Rayman* franchise as a springboard, Ubisoft has crafted a game in the spirit of *Wii Sports* and *WarioWare* – essentially a collection of mini-games designed to capitalise on the console's pick-up-and-play ethic. We tried a selection of the 70 available games, and were told that they will comprise some, though not all of the Story mode which follows Rayman's quest to rid the world of a race of evil mutant rabbits using carrot juice, plungers and a whole host of domestic paraphernalia. The whole thing is probably a thinly veiled metaphor for post-9/11 paranoia. It is from Ubisoft France, after all.

Games are split into four categories: FPS, Trial, Race and Dance. First we tried 'Bunnies Don't Like Carrot Juice', which placed us behind a bar, on a tropical island, faced with a sea of scuba-diving rabbits. Rapidly shaking the left controller keeps a jet of carrot juice flowing while the Wiimote directs the stream at the advancing bunnies. The arm shaking became tiring, but was engaging in a bracingly silly way.

IT'S ALL IN THE HIPS

Although Michel Ancel and Ubisoft are cagey about the use of the nunchaku, some information has slipped through. A movement with both handsets will make Rayman grapple the nearest enemy, while whirling them around your head will make him swing and throw them. While in the air, you can execute a dive attack by pushing the nunchaku toward the ground. There will also be games involving dancing with rabbits, but Ancel is tight-lipped as to how that might work.





■ Anyone with a soft spot for bunnies will be relieved by the hideous fur balls on show here.

"WE DON'T SEE ANYONE CHASING THE DAWN IN A SOLO SESSION, FIGHTING BUNNIES"

More satisfying was the second game, a rail-shooter set in a mock-wild-west town. Rabbits pour from doorways, windows and roofs, while you attempt to shoot them with toilet plungers. The Wiimote was used to aim and shoot while a sharp flick of the left wrist reloaded. Much like every game, the set-up is simple, but there is a great sense of reward in seeing your accuracy improve as you adjust to the control sensitivity and you start taking out rabbits in mid-air.

One game saw you racing on the back of a rhino, using the analogue stick to steer and the Wiimote to whip the beast. Another had you on a dance floor, using the twin controls to club rabbits as they approached on either side. If Nintendo Wii is to forever be defined by its control method, then it seems that games such as this are the purest distillation of the ideas behind the technology. Each task presents a fresh new way of using the 'nunchaku', and the emphasis upon simple group-play is in keeping with Nintendo's democratic vision. We don't see anyone chasing the dawn in a solo session, fighting bunnies, but with a machine like Wii that isn't the point. When *Rayman Raving Rabbids* is looking a hotter prospect than *Red Steel* it suggests that Wii could force many to reassess what they regard a credible game.

KILLZONE: LIBERATION

TOP-DOWN GUERRILLA WARFARE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Netherlands
PUBLISHER: Sony
DEVELOPER: Guerrilla
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-6

CONCEPT

This top-down squad shooter with a focus on action captures *Killzone's* urban warfare aesthetic and places it in an adjacent genre.

Guerrilla's decision to haul *Killzone* out from its first-person viewpoint is so far proving to be an excellent one. Its tale of apocalyptic urban warfare is now told from above, sharing more in common with an RTS than an FPS, and bringing some much-needed immediacy to the series. Simple controls, stylish visuals and a heady dose of action are all it takes to inject life into a franchise already flagging after just one instalment.

From the get-go, *Killzone: Liberation* is all about shooting. You guide a small but perfectly formed soldier through the trenches and streets, disposing of Helghast infantry using a laser sight, and rush between objectives. Simple. Involving. Fun. Visually, *Liberation* doesn't disappoint either. Although the top-down viewpoint dispenses with detail, the crisp widescreen display and amusing rag doll physics couple to form an impressive mix. Explosions go off all around you, bullets scream past your head; there's a genuine sense of being right in the middle of a conflict, quite an achievement considering the traditionally distancing viewpoint. Controls are also handled perfectly, with no unnecessary complications – it's always a pleasure when a game has been built for PSP from the ground up – and the clunking, plodding slog of *Killzone* on PS2 is now a thing of the past.

As Guerrilla's new baby is a squad-based game at heart, players can jab the D-pad to dish out commands to a 'buddy', ranging from simple movement to environmental tasks (lay C4, man gun turret and so on),

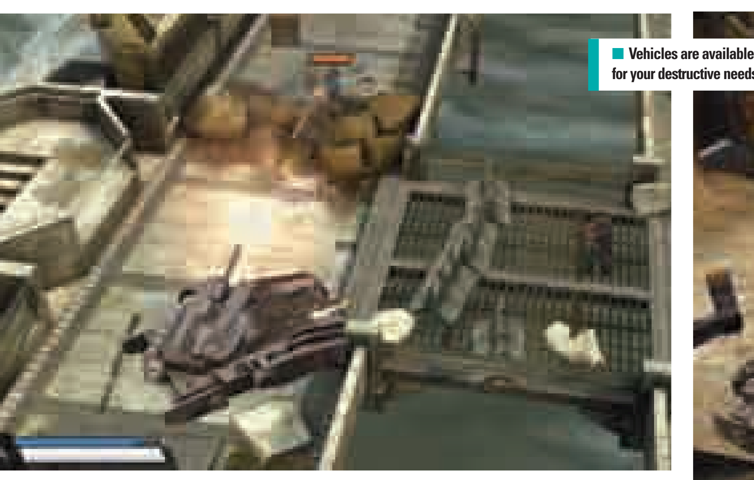


Moving your team-mate is a simple case of tapping the D-pad in the appropriate direction.

> "THE SENSE OF CAMARADERIE BETWEEN TWO PLAYERS OUTWEIGHS THE ENTERTAINMENT OF ACTUALLY PLAYING THE GAME"

but *Killzone: Liberation's* hidden weapon is its Co-op mode. *Miami Vice* has already shown how much fun two people can have together with their PSPs on, and *Liberation* is the natural evolution of this dynamic. As the missions feature tasks that require two people to work in tandem, albeit in a fairly standard 'protect me while I do this' style, the sense of camaraderie between two players outweighs the entertainment of actually playing the game. If the early levels are anything to go by, this could rapidly become a favourite way to kill a lazy Sunday afternoon. A classic case of 'more than the sum of its parts'.

On top of the excellent co-op comes a six-player ad-hoc deathmatch. With six available maps, it's shaping up as a fun aside, but be in no doubt that the co-op is the game's main course. This is excellent PSP fodder, and further proof that the console is finally delivering on its early promise. Whether or not the basic nature of the gameplay can hold up to an entire single-player campaign is a definite worry, but for now be assured that *Killzone's* second coming is a damn sight more exciting than its first. Can the forthcoming PS3 sequel further strengthen *Killzone's* stock?

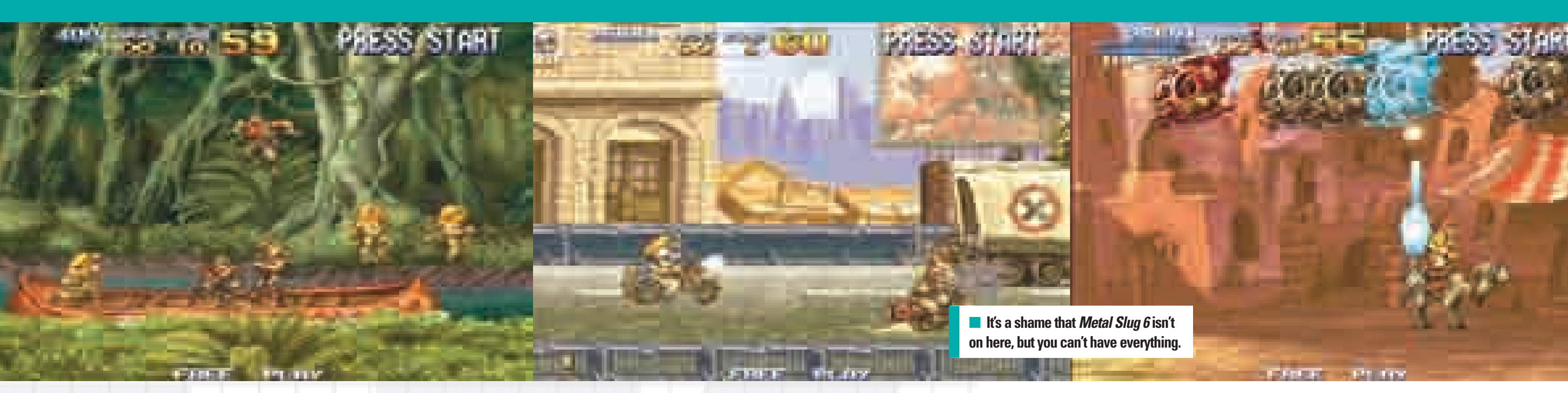




Vehicles are available for your destructive needs.


eMag

METAL SLUG ANTHOLOGY



It's a shame that *Metal Slug 6* isn't on here, but you can't have everything.

RESCUING HOSTAGES SINCE 1996

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore
RELEASE: 27 October
GENRE: Shoot-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

Six of the greatest run-and-gun games of all time, collated on one disc and complemented with unlockable extras and PSP-specific modes.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of SNK's beloved shooting series, ***Metal Slug***. From its debut in the arcades to the subsequent home conversions and five sequels (as well as spin-off games for the Neo Geo Pocket and Game Boy Advance), the series has steadily recruited an army of fans who religiously dedicate themselves to mastering the ancient art of running and gunning. Chances are that those fans don't need to be told how exciting a *Metal Slug Anthology* really is; the opportunity to play the first two games, alone, should be enough to get those players foaming at the mouth since neither have ever been released on a UK console before.

Those fans simply need to know the answer to one question: do the conversions hold up to the arcade originals? The answer, thankfully, is yes. All six games (*Metal Slug 1-5* plus *Metal Slug X*) play brilliantly on Sony's portable PlayStation. There are rare occasions when the game slows down, but such occurrences are fleeting and have little effect on the gameplay. It also takes a few moments to get used to PSP's stubborn D-pad but once that's done the games play like a dream.

The preview build we've road-tested features all six games in their original arcade ratios, and we're pleased to confirm that they lose none of their appeal on the small screen. The animations are still some of the most awe-inspiring two-dimensional works ever committed to silicon, and the action still plays as satisfyingly as ever. Our only real problem is that the flow of the game can sometimes be interrupted by loading times – mid-level if a character is changed after a continue or if one of the secret routes is chosen. Such problems are a relatively small price to pay, however, for the ability to play these classic games anywhere and any time.

In addition to the six games, Ignition promises that each title will be playable in a custom widescreen mode that takes full advantage of the PSP screen as well as a two-player Wi-Fi mode and unlockable extras. Such features are not part of the preview build, but the prospect of playing *Metal Slug* in widescreen for the first time is one that could make *Metal Slug Anthology* worth having, even for those who already own all the games separately. However, that will depend on how well SNK can make the game look without adversely affecting the gameplay.

"THE ANIMATIONS ARE SOME OF THE MOST AWE-INSPIRING TWO-DIMENSIONAL WORKS EVER COMMITTED TO SILICON"



One of the best looking 2D games looks superb on the PSP screen.



With impressive conversions like this, it's only a matter of time before we see a *King Of Fighters Anthology*.


eMag

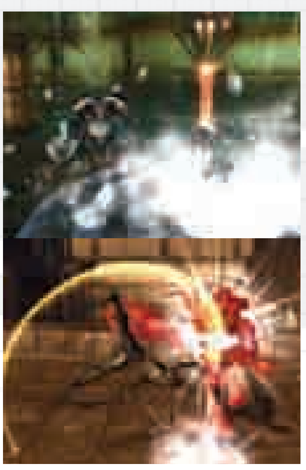
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

SONY'S RPG FRANCHISE TURNS NEXT GEN

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: US
Publisher: Sony Online Entertainment
Developer: In-House
Genre: Role-Playing Game
Players: TBA



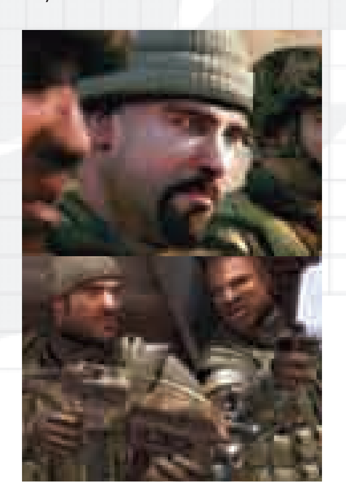
After two relatively successful PSP appearances, Sony Online Entertainment's action RPG, *Untold Legends*, makes its PS3 bow with all the graphical splendour and fanciful lighting one would expect. With a story penned by *D&D* author Kenneth Baker, the familiar hack-and-slash gameplay and the promise of online co-op, this should appease anyone hungry for more *Untold Legends* action. As for the rest of us, it will have to do more than simply ape its PSP forebears in order to be considered a worthy PS3 launch title – the age of button bashing should surely be over by now. Not the most exciting game this November, that's for sure.

RELEASE: US: 17 NOVEMBER

BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY

COMPANY OF HEROES

Format: PlayStation3, Xbox 360
Origin: Sweden
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: DICE
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Players: TBA



While it appears *Battlefield 2142* will definitely not see a console release, the news that DICE is working on the delicious looking *Bad Company* should be enough to appease those hungry for more EA-fuelled warfare. Scant details have been released thus far, but the words "featuring a deep, cinematic single-player experience loaded with adventure and dark humour" is sure to trouble those who enjoy *Battlefield's* distancing view of war. Nevertheless, DICE is boasting a 90 per cent destructible environment, and a single-player that captures the sandbox madness of previous *Battlefields*. With about a year left in development, this could be something very special indeed.

RELEASE: TBA

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

LOOKING EVEN BETTER?

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Canada
Publisher: Electronic Arts
Developer: In-House
Genre: Sports
Players: 1-2



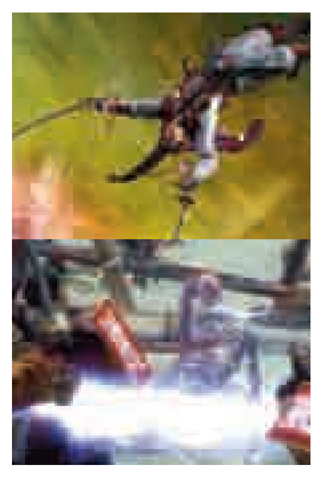
Amazingly, 360's *Fight Night Round 3* has already been surpassed visually, if these new PS3 screenshots are anything to go by. By far the greatest boxing game ever created, *Round 3* maintains its superb Total Punch Control, while adding an extra layer of sweat, sheen and shine to the already phenomenal character models. EA has been quick to throw the words 'Get In The Ring mode' into the mix within its pre-release literature, but, ingeniously, has chosen not to tell anyone what this actually means. If it's a way of stopping online opponents using the face buttons and 'cheaping' their way to victory, then count us in. After all, no one can beat our De La Hoya, unless they cheat.

RELEASE: TBA

GENJI: DAYS OF THE BLADE

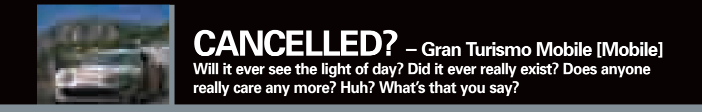
LIVE BY THE SWORD, DIE BY THE SWORD

Format: PlayStation3
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Sony
Developer: Game Republic
Genre: Action
Players: TBA

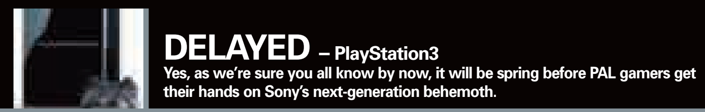


Godfather of *Street Fighter*, Yoshiki Okamato, is pushing ahead with his retelling of Japanese history in *Genji: Days Of The Blade* the next-gen sequel to last year's entertaining *Onimusha*-a-like. Expect more swordplay, spells and samurai, with a PS3 graphical overhaul and the now regulation inclusion of realistic physics and HDR lighting. Players can switch between one of four playable characters at any time allowing for some meaty double-team moves and tag-team combat. It'll be interesting to see if Okamoto and co can expand *Genji's* quite limited gameplay to cover the reported 15-hour play time, and if it will take advantage of the PS3 hardware for anything more than looks.

RELEASE: TBA



CANCELLED? – Gran Turismo Mobile [Mobile]
Will it ever see the light of day? Did it ever really exist? Does anyone really care any more? Huh? What's that you say?

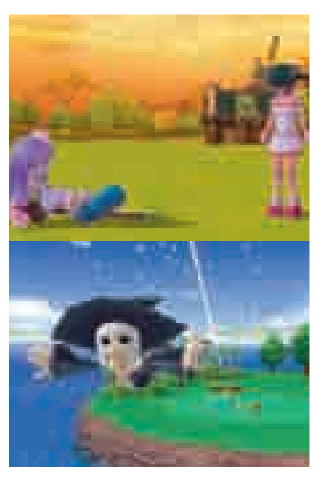


DELAYED – PlayStation3
Yes, as we're sure you all know by now, it will be spring before PAL gamers get their hands on Sony's next-generation behemoth.

SUPER SWING GOLF: PANGYA

IDEAL Wii FODDER

Format:	Nintendo Wii
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Tecmo
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Sports
Players:	TBA



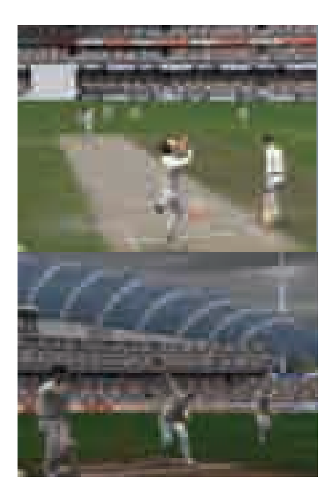
If there was one thing that the Wiimote screamed from the second it was announced, it was golf. *Wii Sports* already has an amusing bit of pitch-and-putt action, but it's Tecmo's *Everybody's-Golf*-esque take on the subject matter that seems all the more appealing. It looks lovely – all blue skies and lush greens – and the Wiimote is put to good use of course, taking the place of a golf club as you swing it liberally back and forth for each stroke. Whether the level of control available with this method will be sufficient to allow for deft chips, fades and draws is not yet known, but given our time with other Wii titles, the technology is most definitely there.

RELEASE: TBA

EA SPORTS CRICKET 07

FINALLY A CRICKET GAME WORTH PLAYING?

Format:	PC, PlayStation2
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Sports
Players:	TBA



It's very rare indeed to see a cricket game receive coverage in games™, but *EA Sports Cricket 07* is finally moving the sport's digital representation forward. It seems to have taken years to finally arrive, but EA's 'century stick' is the innovation that everyone has been expecting for quite some time. Effectively mapping the batting controls to the right stick, this should do for cricket what *Fight Night* did for boxing, and finally give anyone with pre-Ashes fever reason to not pack the PS2 away just yet this Christmas. Expect more 'right stick' love across the board in all of EA Sports' titles this winter – those Canadians just can't get enough of it.

RELEASE: NOVEMBER

NBA STREET

AS FAR FROM AND1 AS YOU CAN POSSIBLY GET

Format:	PlayStation3, Xbox 360
Origin:	Canada
Publisher:	Electronic Arts
Developer:	In-House
Genre:	Sports
Players:	TBA



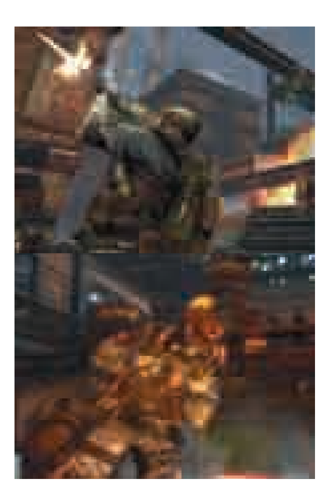
Even more EA Sports action in the showcase this month with the announcement that the routinely excellent street basketball sim *NBA Street* is getting a next-gen revamp. Featuring gorgeous player models, countless new animations and (hopefully) a fully fledged Online mode, this should eat up many an evening come release. Street basketball works brilliantly in videogame form, from the days of *NBA Jam* through to Midway's *Ballers* (*And1* conveniently forgotten, of course) and the series has consistently improved in terms of both visuals and gameplay. The leap to next gen is not likely to be particularly revolutionary, but when it ain't broke…

RELEASE: TBA

PARABELLUM

THOSE GERMAN'S SURE LOVE THEIR STRATEGY

Format:	PC, PlayStation2
Origin:	Germany
Publisher:	TBA
Developer:	Acony
Genre:	First-Person Shooter
Players:	TBA



This gorgeous looking strategy FPS hails from Germany, the fabled land of tank games and heavy statistics. With a firm focus on tactical urban warfare, *Parabellum* already draws comparisons with *Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter* but promises to offer more brain food than Ubisoft's classic. As the game is turn based, players will need to rely on their knowledge of battlefield tactics and not just their accuracy with an M-16 in order to succeed. A good thing? Well, it's unlikely it will trouble anything Clancy related, but it looks like a strong PC title for strategic types to sink their teeth into. Still, give us *Rainbow Six* any day of the week.

RELEASE: 2007


DWEEB
WHALE



Having a whale of a time **The Outfoxies, Arcade [Namco] 1994**



MORE THAN ONE PRODUCER HAS GATHERED THEIR DESIGN TEAM IN THE DYING MONTHS OF A GAME DEVELOPMENT CYCLE TO TRY AND DISSUADE THEM FROM CHANGING ANOTHER FEATURE BEFORE SHIPPING. A simple graph is displayed with time running along one axis and a steeply climbing line describing dollars spent along the other. It makes the following point: early in development, when every decision is on paper and no code has been written, you can change virtually any feature in the game simply by deleting a sentence in a document, while toward the end of the project even the tiniest change can often involve more work for everyone from designers and producers to artists and animators to engineers and musicians.

So why is it that the base assumptions, which will haunt a game team for years of development, are often given so little consideration? Many early decisions seem to be made almost by default: why was almost every movie-based action game for the entirety of the Nineties a side-scrolling platform game? Why have most of them become third-person action brawlers or remained derivative, level-based platformers? There are many obvious reasons for this, including the fact that short development cycles for licensed games mean decisions need to be made fast; that existing technology often makes one type of game simpler to create for a team than another; that precedent can remove a lot of the design risk from a project and again speed up development, but surely better results could come from, and troubles could be avoided by some testing of the more basic design choices. Level design has received almost no serious thought on a macro level. While great attention is lavished upon defining the shape and structure of the levels themselves or describing the puzzle and story elements, very little focus is often placed on the decision that should precede it: what kind of game level structure is best suited to this type of game?

A Single Screen Is All You Need

Pac-Man is one of the greatest games ever made, mostly because it's one of the simplest. Its single joystick controls are easy to learn, its pixel-eating goals are clear, the dangers are both charming and relentless, it plays into a basic human desire to bring order to the screen by eating all those messy dots, and it has one brilliant reversal feature that allows the player to switch from the hunted to the hunter at key points in play. It doesn't need scrolling, it doesn't need a story, and it doesn't even need a button to go with the joystick.

The fact that the entire game takes place on a single screen is also key to its

success as a game. "Most important [is] presenting a clear goal, progress, and feedback, and forcing all the game pieces to come into contact and interact," says Chaim Gingold, a designer on the upcoming *Spore*. "Your goal and progress is always clear, which helps to generate the feeling of flow – a clear goal, progress, and feedback. 'I must clear the screen, and I'm halfway there.' Also, all the game pieces are on the table, which, besides being elegant, presents an overview of the game and its rules, so the player always has the opportunity to plan and react. The one-screen maze, like a good story, pushes all the actors together, and forces them to interact and release dramatic energy which would not work over multiple screens because, aside from taking too long to clear, the player would rarely get pressured or goaded by the ghosts."

Many people think that the single-screen game met a swift death in the Eighties, but although its popularity waned, titles like *Smash TV* successfully used many of the same tricks in the Nineties, and one of gaming's most popular franchises, *The Sims*, is also basically a single-screen game. At the core of a player's belief in the little computer people is the ability to parse the entire house and its occupants in a single glance, making it possible to reverse engineer their motives or behaviours, and making them seem like real characters.

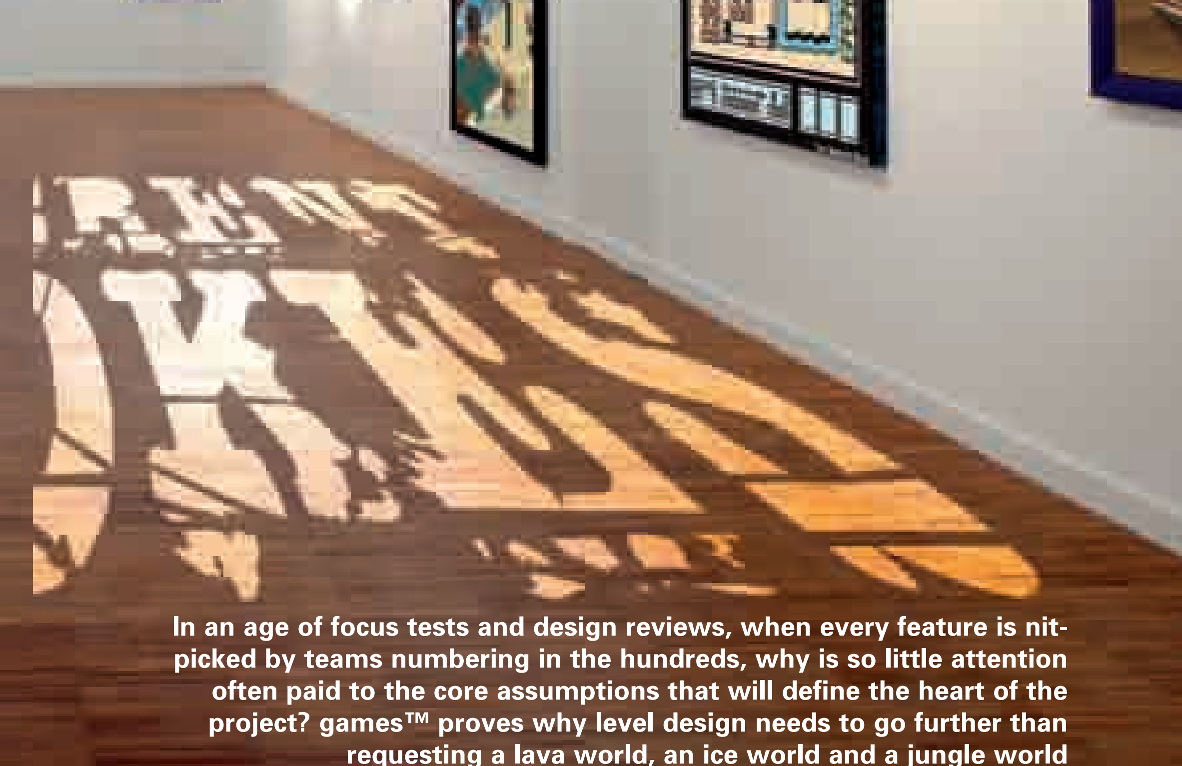
Transport the game to a larger environment – even three or four scrolling screens – and all the connective tissue begins to tear. The player can no longer connect the fact that a sim drank a cup of coffee and then went to the toilet or that another sim slapped their lover because they'd been fooling around with the next-door neighbour. If the events leading up to these story moments had happened off screen and out of sight then the pivotal moments would have felt disconnected and random.

"Everyone has a better relationship with the fish in the bowl than with the fish in the ocean," says Seppo Helava, designer on *The Sims 2* PS2. "The biggest benefit to having relatively small levels in *The Sims* is the focus that it provides. Of course there are other benefits because of the technology involved: more stuff in the environment, and the sense that the area is densely populated with interactive objects. On the same technology, with an open world, with the same team size, it'd be unlikely that we could create the same illusion of reality."

Linear Levels And Simple Stories

When *Super Mario Bros* hit the Nintendo Entertainment System it not only saved videogames from an untimely demise, but it also brought a mountain of innovation and polish, not the least of which was a smoothly scrolling environment with consistent rules, a simple story and a legitimate ending.

No longer did games



In an age of focus tests and design reviews, when every feature is nit-picked by teams numbering in the hundreds, why is so little attention often paid to the core assumptions that will define the heart of the project? games™ proves why level design needs to go further than requesting a lava world, an ice world and a jungle world

WORDS: **ALEX HUTCHINSON**

finish whenever you ran out of money at the arcade or when your patience died in front of your Atari 2600; now games could actually be won and the princess could truly be saved. It wasn't Shakespeare, but it worked. Games could possess structured beginnings, middles and endings, allowing better characterisation as well as greater empathy with both the player avatar and the other characters in the game world.

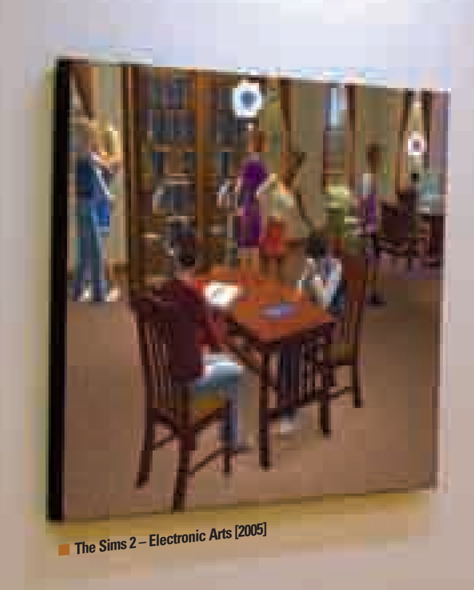
God Of War is a fine example of this. While there is virtually never a moment when you as the player can leave the scripted path designed for you, each successive event and mission builds the vengeful and violent character of the avatar and fleshes out the fantastical re-imagining of Greek myth. And although the battle system and upgrade path is beautifully constructed and refined, it is the story and the desire to see new levels and events that pulls the player through the game.

However, the features the game design relinquishes to make this possible are equally valuable, the largest of which is probably the sense of agency the player has, or, to put it another way, the reduction in the amount of choices the player can make. Some story-based games have attempted to give multiple solutions to puzzles and situations, but in a level-based game you are always acutely aware that there is a correct solution that you need to uncover so that you can progress – you are following a very scripted path from beginning to end and your sense of being a character in the world, who can actually affect change or make a difference is destroyed.

Even though it predates *God Of War*, *Halo* took this concept forward another step. It hid its linear chapter-based nature behind streaming levels that never let the player put the controller down, and then reduced the sense of frustration at repeating the exact same scenarios endlessly if you failed by its judicious placement of auto-save points.

"*Halo* also mixed the concepts of streamlined linear levels with some of the features of a single-screen game," says Hamilton Chu, a producer on *Halo* and co-founder of Giant Bite Inc. "Both games strung individual, focused encounters into a series of experiences based around different core concepts: fighting, exploration, vistas, exposition. This gave it some of the advantages of single-stage games in that the player could wrap his brain

"IT IS THE STORY AND THE DESIRE TO SEE NEW LEVELS AND EVENTS THAT PULLS THE PLAYER THROUGH THE GAME"



The Sims 2 – Electronic Arts [2005]



Midwinter – Microplay [1990]

around what was going on, but also the advantages of the linear where it pulled you through the story."

Choice And Opportunity In Open World Games

Open-world level structures were first used in games like *Midwinter*, but it was *Grand Theft Auto III* that brought it to the masses. The feeling of actually 'living' in an environment rather than passing down a series of corridors on a predestined path is huge, and the ability to choose, at any moment in the game, between taking on a new mission or simply fooling around in the environment makes the game accessible to both casual players and the hardcore.

Although fine titles in their own rights, games that offered superficially similar experiences such as the original *Driver* failed to match the *Grand Theft Auto* series' appeal or success because they chose a conventional mission-based structure, and linear level design which failed to capitalise on their beautifully rendered city.

The open-world structure also highlights another design element that contributed to *Grand Theft Auto's* success: choice. Everything in the game is about choice, from the radio stations to how to arrive at a new mission and then how to complete its objectives. Even failure is barely punished, with both death and arrest resulting in the player being dropped back into the game to continue enjoying its best feature – the vast, intricate city with the choices and opportunities it offers.

Dead Rising also does a magnificent job of giving the player a large game space which they can navigate in any order, and its use of time and repeat play gives it an incredibly modern design sensibility. Learning the layout and exploiting it over repeated plays is key to getting the most out of the experience, and its recreation of a sprawling mall replete with dozens of stores, all of which are filled with believable objects that can be used and abused by the player shows a true understanding of how setting and function can be bonded to improve the experience that is sorely lacking in most games.

It also finds a way to avoid punishing the new casual player by building failure into the basic structure. In fact, as the game stores the experience and unlocked abilities of the avatar – even after death – it actually rewards death and allows the player to begin again but with the new skills they acquired during their previous attempt.

But this openness comes at a price. "The biggest challenge on *The Godfather* was the constant fight between wanting to deliver a structured cinematic experience while allowing for player creativity," says Will Kerslake, a designer on the project. "Linear objectives are still the best solution we have for delivering a story, but the real draw of open-world games is the freedom and satisfaction players feel when they discover unexpected ways of dealing with obstacles. Trying to design an obstacle that can be defeated in unexpected ways without breaking is a challenge. Introducing features smoothly and ramping difficulty is another big issue; a player who can potentially go anywhere they want can quickly get themselves into trouble. Since this might lead some of your audience to learn your game through failure, you need to make sure the punishment for these failures is as soft as possible."

Procedural Levels And Infinite Content

The open-world structure also raises another interesting problem: how do you realistically create enough cool, original assets to populate a level if the level is now the size of the entire west coast of America, as it is in *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*? If we intend to expand the playfield to an entire country, as in the *Elder Scrolls* series, or even the universe, as in the upcoming *Spore*, then how do you actually create and place enough content to make it work?

One potential answer is Procedural Level Generation. In other words, environments are built based on rules rather than hand built by designers, and creatures, objects and features are placed within them automatically by the game itself to fit specific game situations such as the player's level, success or position in the story.



Smash TV – Acclaim [1991]

"HOW DO YOU CREATE ENOUGH ORIGINAL ASSETS TO POPULATE THE ENTIRE WEST COAST OF AMERICA?"

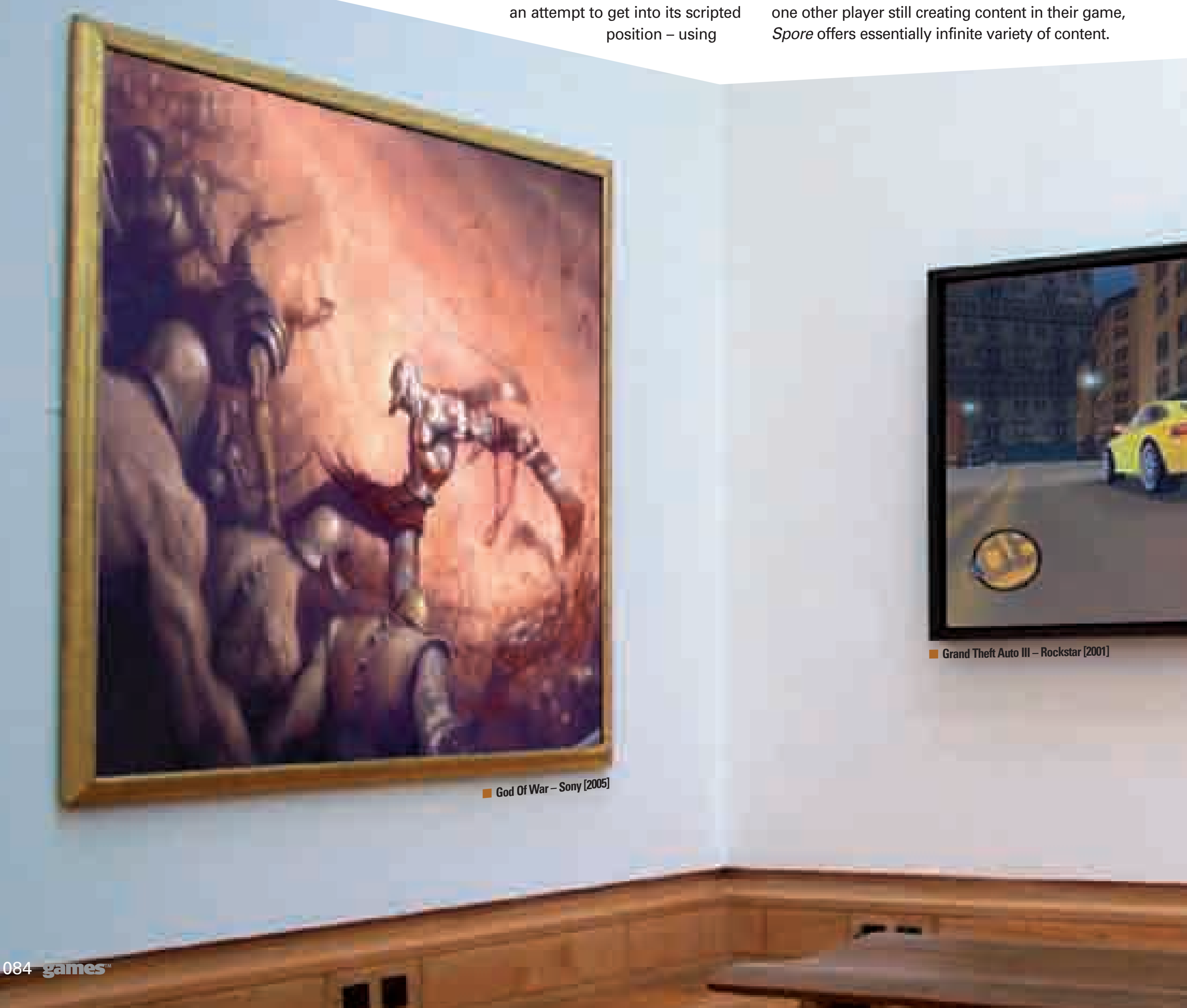
The *Diablo* series is one successful implementation of this idea, where much of each level is built from a rule-based arrangement of passage tiles, making each dungeon an original maze, with feature tiles being placed within them to offer structure and story-based encounters. It means that the designers can be certain that you'll stumble across the appropriate junction points, but the trip there will always be at least superficially different. It also backs up another design feature, in that the high-level item drops in *Diablo* are rare enough that players need to get through the game multiple times in order to collect a set, so pseudo-random levels are a must to avoid boredom and repetition.

For the last decade, Bethesda has been experimenting with taking this idea one step further culminating in *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion*, which creates a lot of its content dynamically and scales its difficulty to match the player's current core level. If, as a new player, you enter a cave near the start location, you're likely to find an unarmoured brigand as your foe, but return as a high-level character and the brigand will be wearing magical armour and waving a flaming sword in your face.

It's by no means a new concept, and lots of older games like *Super Mario Kart* or *NBA Jam* were already employing a simplified version of this by trying to give slight advantages to losing players and imperceptible penalties to winning players, which is great in theory but can lead to some ridiculous failure cases. "*California Speed*, like many coin-op arcade games, was designed to offer the player a very scripted experience," says Kerslake. "You raced against nine other opponents and they were offered to you one at a time as you progressed through the track, which is fine in theory, but we found that it was possible to sneak just in front of the ninth-placed AI car on the opening turn. Since you weren't supposed to be in ninth place yet the AI car would suddenly accelerate far beyond its normal top speed in an attempt to get into its scripted position – using the on-screen radar you could steer directly in front of the AI car and ride it as it bumped you forward, which, if done properly, could boost you way beyond the game's intended top speed. While it didn't affect the outcome of the race, this trick allowed us to get track times that made the original arcade engineers think we'd hacked the cabinet."

Assuming you can avoid these obvious pitfalls, there is still a major question that no game has successfully answered: how do you create a compelling, structured experience in a world you've designed to be vast and unpredictable? The solution is one of game design's Holy Grails: an experience that is always interesting and challenging but always allows the player to win by the skin of their teeth without getting frustrated.

One attempt to answer this question can be seen in *Spore*, a game which hands the job of creature, building, vehicle and planet creation to the player, and then shares the results with all the other players in the world. In terms of actual new 'things', this solves one facet of the problem: so long as there is one other player still creating content in their game, *Spore* offers essentially infinite variety of content.



God Of War – Sony [2005]

Grand Theft Auto III – Rockstar [2001]

The danger is that it becomes a big mess of essentially random stuff and the player is just dropped down into the middle of it, or, as was the case with *Oblivion*, the world feels illogical because the bandits you fought when you were Level 1 have magically become Level 30 and gained platinum armour when you revisit the same location three hours later without any other factor in the game having changed.

It Is A Question Of Preference

The truth is that even if a game solves the problems mentioned above and produces a game that is infinitely replayable, it is not necessarily a direction that the entire industry will or should take. The point is that all the best games have a very clean match between the high-level vision for the game and the low-level structure of the level or world in which it's played, and that seemingly innocuous decisions can be the difference between critical and commercial success and a good idea ruined by poor decisions made early in the project.

Level Design 101

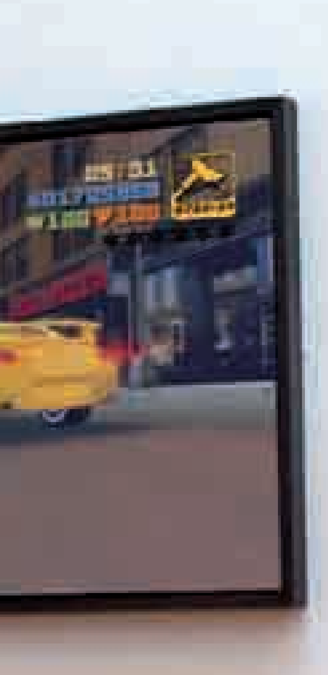
For anyone with the dream of following a career in game design, Tim Miller, level designer from Nihilistic Software is here to share his experience and run through a few issues that potential designers should watch out for…

"No matter what game you're working on, it's important to keep in mind that there are always constraints. A lot of times, designers will want to build out the biggest, craziest areas for the maximum visual impact, but by the time the artists get hold of it and all your AI starts running around, your amazing location can look more like a series of screenshots as the engine struggles to render it all.

"Placing constraints on yourself or your design can be a tremendous advantage. Too many rookie designers come up with grand ideas for massive games that will break all kinds of new ground, but because they've bitten off so much, it's unlikely that they'll ever be able to finish it all.

"The number-one thing I look for in a level designer is their ability to actually finish a level. That is to say the level they have built needs to have a beginning, a middle, and, most importantly, an end. A lot of rookie level designers just don't know when to stop building and so they end up with sprawling levels that lack focus. One of the easiest ways to avoid this problem is to map your level out on paper before you start actually building it in the editor.

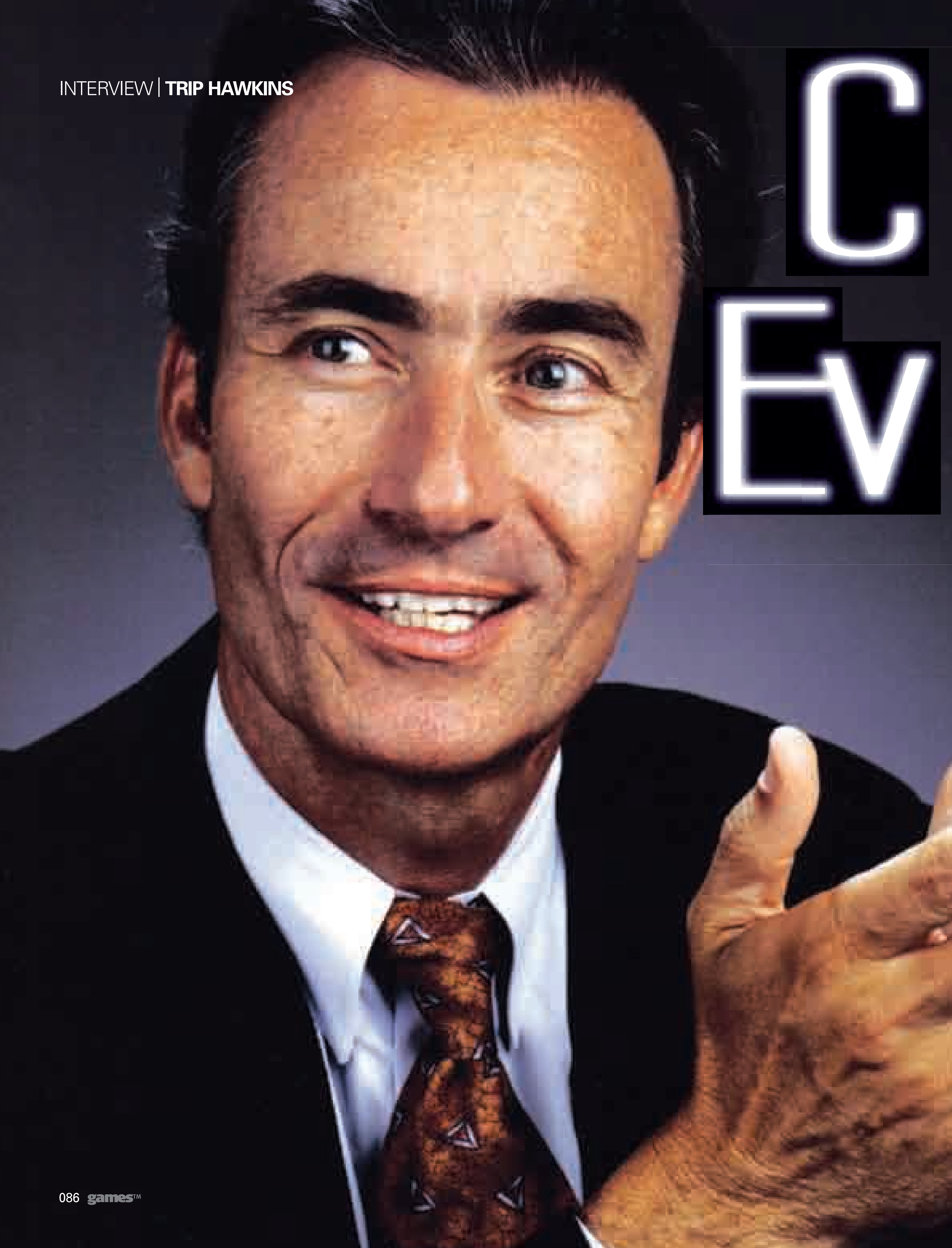
"While paper design may not be the 'fun' part of being a level designer, refining your ideas before you build can save a ton of time later on. Also, if you're working with a team, it's always helpful to bounce your gameplay ideas off your team-mates before getting started. Usually they'll help you improve your ideas or make you see that it was a stupid plan in the first place."





The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion – 2K Games [2006]

"HOW DO YOU CREATE A STRUCTURED EXPERIENCE IN A WORLD YOU'VE DESIGNED TO BE VAST AND UNPREDICTABLE?"


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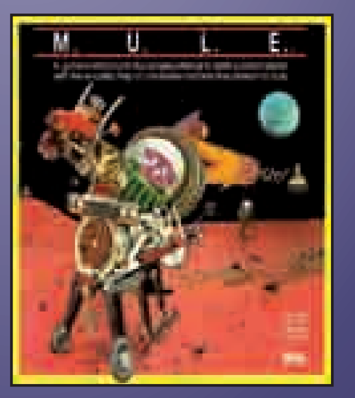


Whether you're a fan of Trip Hawkins and his ventures or not, there's no denying that he's one of the longest running industry veterans around. He was there when the videogame scene initially exploded, exerting his own influence over events when he worked at Apple, and going on to co-found Electronic Arts. He was there for the big crash of 1984 – sticking through it, making a profitable deal with Sega, and then emerging as head of one of the most successful game companies ever. He later formed the 3DO company and oversaw a hardware launch in the hope of kick-starting a revolution, before eventually stepping down from Electronic Arts. After this he started another company, Digital Chocolate, and now deals exclusively with mobile phone content. He is undoubtedly one of the foundational figures that made videogames what they are today, and for this reason ***games™*** *stopped to talk with him a while. We asked about his history, what he's doing now, and also his forecasts for the future…*

WORDS: **JOHN SZCZEPANIAK**



The *Madden* games may have come a seriously long way, but back when Trip was just starting out, screens like this were revolutionary.

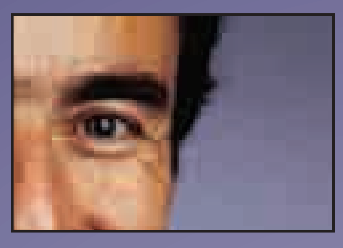


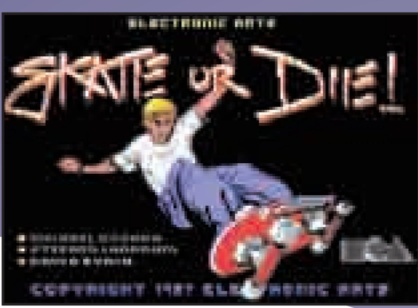
A bit of a cult classic, *M.U.L.E.* was popular with a select few, but didn't enjoy wild commercial success.



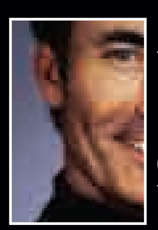
■ Will *Tower Bloxx* be the next time-draining puzzler to hit mobile gaming?







Touching Everyone



Some of the things Trip Hawkins has been involved in, which have in some way (metaphorically) touched (almost) everyone:

Joined Apple in 1978, was involved in a major marketing shift, stepped down as product marketing director four years after that.

Formed Electronic Arts in 1982, which went on to become the biggest game publisher and developer in the world.

Tracked down Dan Bunten, aided in and oversaw the development of iconic strategic multi-player game *M.U.L.E.*

Initiated the We See Farther campaign encouraging game designers to be portrayed and treated as artists.

Aided in the design of the original *Madden Football*, a series that went on to become one of the biggest selling sports franchises ever.

Reverse engineered Sega's Mega Drive, and was one of the first third-party companies to develop for it. In doing so, helped Sega gain market dominance in the States.

Launched the 3DO Multi-player system. Not since MSX has there been an attempt at a licensed-out single-format.

Formed Digital Chocolate.

gamesTM: What's the strangest question you've been asked?
Trip Hawkins: Usually I put the really weird ones out of my mind, apparently permanently. But twice in one day recently I had people ask me questions while calling me Tim. It's one thing for people to call me William or Bill without realising I don't go by my real first name, but where did they come up with Tim?

gTM: Most baffling. So why do we know you as Trip?
TH: I'm actually William M Hawkins III. When I was a few days old, my grandfather suggested the nickname Trippy because I was a triplicate. It got shortened to Trip when I was about ten years old.

gTM: Tell us something about your early career.
TH: I programmed in ten different languages as part of the custom major I created at Harvard, called Strategy and Applied Game Theory. My simulation of nuclear war won grant awards from the Kennedy School of Government and was mentioned at the annual conference of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

gTM: So how did EA come about?
TH: I was doing a summer job in 1975 when I first determined that I would start Electronic Arts in 1982. Yes, that's right, I planned it specifically seven years in advance. My reference points for EA were Hollywood for product development, and the record business for promotion and distribution.

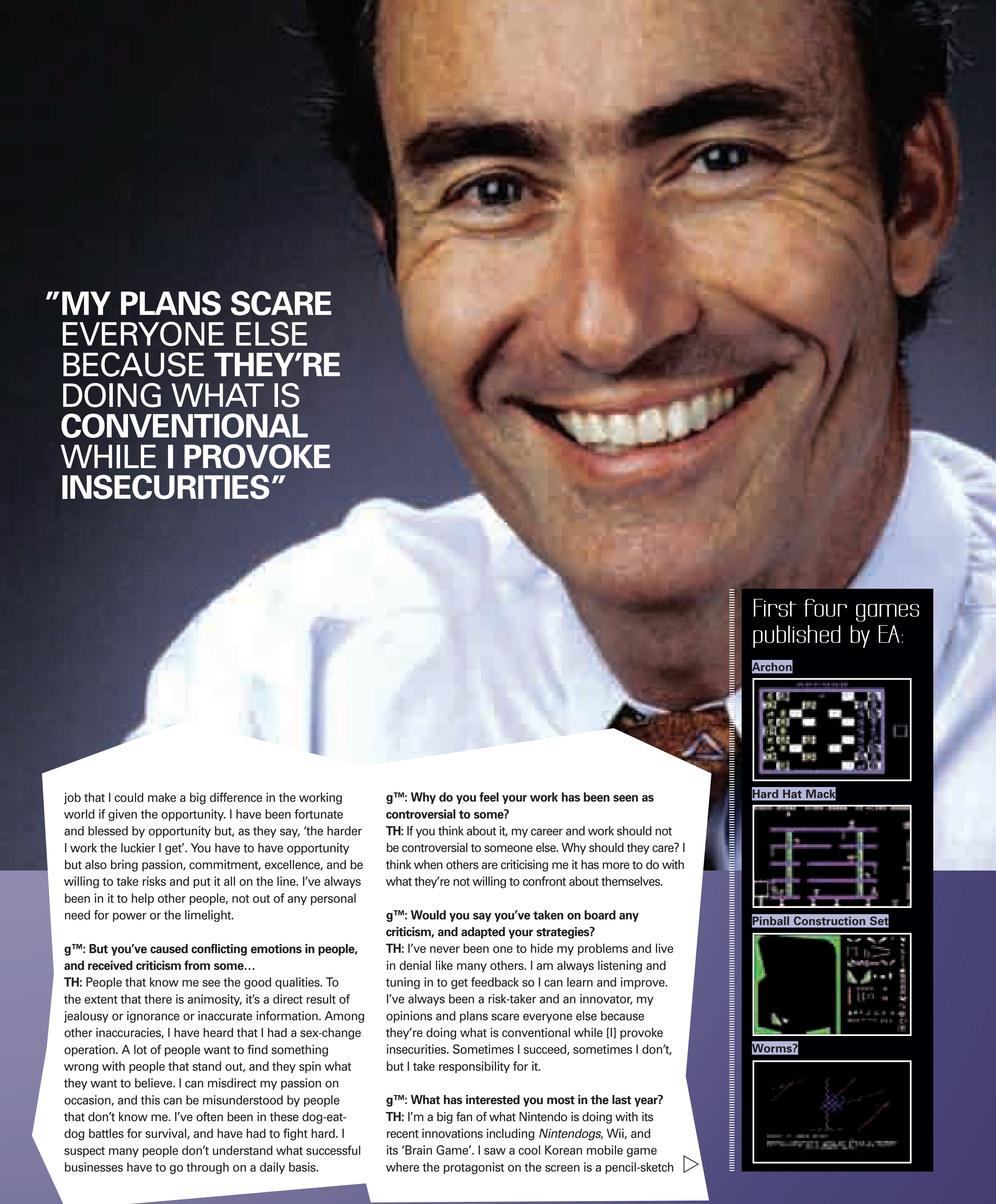
gTM: What is your single biggest industry regret?
TH: The way that the 3DO project separated me from EA, and the fact that I stuck with 3DO so long when it just didn't have the resources to be competitive.

gTM: Could you elaborate?
TH: I lined up the support of Matsushita, but publishers [such as] EA felt like they had to play the field. By 1994, it was clear that 3DO was struggling and EA was moving away. 3DO had to take severe steps to survive, [so it became] a competing publisher. I was advised legally that I shouldn't be on the board of both companies because of conflicting interests. In effect I was stranded at 3DO not unlike how Captain Bligh was left in a lifeboat. But I chose poorly; I chose 3DO because I felt obligated to help the one that was like a child having surgery in the hospital. EA was more like a rebellious teenager that was growing up and could fend for itself. In hindsight it is obvious that I should have stayed at EA. But I have no regrets.

gTM: 3DO gained some popularity in Japan. Microsoft hasn't been so lucky. Your thoughts?
TH: 3DO had several Japanese partners, notably Matsushita. So it seemed like a Japanese product to the Japanese market. Japan is an incredibly well organised economy and culture when it comes to systematically refusing to take something seriously if it might become a threat to their economy. The consumers have this in their bones. For example, as far as they can tell, rice cannot be made outside Japan.

gTM: What would you have done differently had you stayed at Electronic Arts?
TH: A lot of things, but there's no accounting for taste. I've no doubt I would have done some things better and some things worse. You have to respect the consistency they've had, whereas I would have wanted to experiment more. I also take a very different approach to people and organisational culture.

gTM: In 2005 you were recorded in the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences' Hall of Fame, and prior to that voted 15th Most Fascinating Entrepreneur by Inc.com as well as featuring in Forbes and many other publications, with both adulation and animosity. What's it like being an iconic figure who is still written about? And what do your family think?
TH: I cannot recall being asked this kind of question before, and I think it deserves a longer answer. First, my family loves me and they know I love them. Nothing else really matters, but they know how hard I work and how hard I try to make a positive difference, and they are very supportive. I knew from the first time I had a



"MY PLANS SCARE EVERYONE ELSE BECAUSE **THEY'RE** DOING WHAT IS **CONVENTIONAL** WHILE **I PROVOKE INSECURITIES"**

job that I could make a big difference in the working world if given the opportunity. I have been fortunate and blessed by opportunity but, as they say, 'the harder I work the luckier I get'. You have to have opportunity but also bring passion, commitment, excellence, and be willing to take risks and put it all on the line. I've always been in it to help other people, not out of any personal need for power or the limelight.

g™: But you've caused conflicting emotions in people, and received criticism from some…
TH: People that know me see the good qualities. To the extent that there is animosity, it's a direct result of jealousy or ignorance or inaccurate information. Among other inaccuracies, I have heard that I had a sex-change operation. A lot of people want to find something wrong with people that stand out, and they spin what they want to believe. I can misdirect my passion on occasion, and this can be misunderstood by people that don't know me. I've often been in these dog-eat-dog battles for survival, and have had to fight hard. I suspect many people don't understand what successful businesses have to go through on a daily basis.

g™: Why do you feel your work has been seen as controversial to some?
TH: If you think about it, my career and work should not be controversial to someone else. Why should they care? I think when others are criticising me it has more to do with what they're not willing to confront about themselves.

g™: Would you say you've taken on board any criticism, and adapted your strategies?
TH: I've never been one to hide my problems and live in denial like many others. I am always listening and tuning in to get feedback so I can learn and improve. I've always been a risk-taker and an innovator, my opinions and plans scare everyone else because they're doing what is conventional while [I] provoke insecurities. Sometimes I succeed, sometimes I don't, but I take responsibility for it.

g™: What has interested you most in the last year?
TH: I'm a big fan of what Nintendo is doing with its recent innovations including *Nintendogs*, Wii, and its 'Brain Game'. I saw a cool Korean mobile game where the protagonist on the screen is a pencil-sketch ▷

First four games published by EA:

Archon

Hard Hat Mack

Pinball Construction Set

Worms?

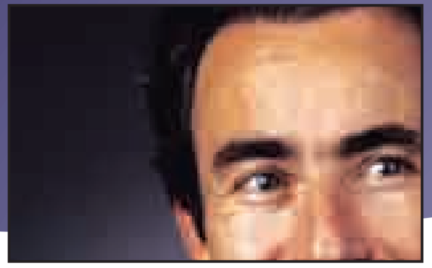


Electric Coco



Trip Hawkins has had a glittering career so far and the future is looking pretty sweet too

Digital Chocolate, Trip Hawkins' current endeavour, is an independent publisher of mobile games. Admittedly, games for mobile phones are generally overlooked by hardcore gamers; they are often simple, visually limited, and difficult to control, but in overlooking this sector, you'd miss an interesting success story. Products from Digital Chocolate – or DChoc as Trip affectionately calls it – have won many awards, with its games generally being regarded by independent mobile critics as some of the best in that sector. *WordKing Poker* was named by Nokia as Game Of The Year; *Mobile League Sports Network* was chosen by IGN as its Innovative Game Of The Year; while *Tower Bloxx* also won a Game Of The Year award and was described by mobile analyst Stuart Dredge at the GDC as one of the best mobile games available. Hawkins has grand plans for the mobile market and, if his company continues to attain such awards, he's likely to achieve his goals. It would be prudent to follow DChoc's developments.



character, as if you drew him. I also just made my own ring tone with ToneMaker DJ, which is really cool.

g™: Did you follow the Gizmondo fiasco?
TH: I could tell the device would fail – it had all the makings – but it was still disappointing to hear about bad behaviour and bad intentions.

g™: Did you see Sony's E3 display? Do you think it is priced too high?
TH: It makes sense that over time the consumer will be able to understand multimedia value beyond just the games. Sony believes in what they are doing and if anyone can lift the price, they can. But I am sure it will be a tough road.

g™: Greg Costikyan once mentioned Noah Fallstein making reference to the 'Trip Hawkins reality distortion field'. Care to comment on this cryptic statement?
TH: I'm part of the group that invented that phrase in reference to my ex-boss, Steve Jobs. So it is not remotely cryptic. Like Steve, I can talk people into things and can be relentless.

g™: Digital Choc has been around since 2003, what have been your biggest challenges/problems with it so far?
TH: First, convincing carriers to offer original mobile brands. After that, convincing them to give them featured placement. We succeeded because carriers now realise that high quality and original mobile titles will generate a buzz and repeat buyers. People will tell their friends about a great game like *Tower Bloxx*.

g™: And your proudest moment?
TH: I was very proud when my game theory mentor, Tom Schelling, won the Nobel Prize last year, and when John Madden was elected to the Football Hall of Fame. Events like that legitimise my life's work. With Digital Chocolate, it has been a great honour for the company to win over 30 awards for product quality and innovation this year.

g™: With over 20 years' industry experience, you're perhaps best equipped to make an accurate prediction. How do you see the balance of power between the three hardware giants this coming generation?
TH: Dude, it's 30 years. I love the way Nintendo and Apple have been backed into corners and battled their way out with innovations, but Sony is a juggernaut company that would be hard for anyone to stop. Microsoft is still pretty early on this journey.

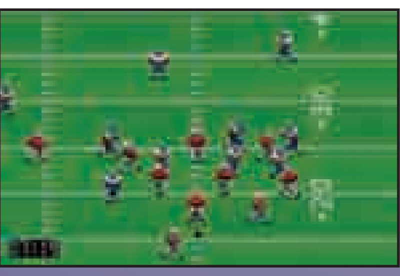
g™: What do you think of Nintendo's Wii controller?
TH: These guys are the most 'outside-the-box' thinkers in the industry right now, I just love it. It may not be everyone's cup of tea, but it will do well and it stirs things up.

g™: Region-free gaming. Will companies ever abandon territorial barriers for good?
TH: I hope so. I've always thought it was very silly to bother with. Unleash the hounds.

g™: Also, do you think a single format for consoles is still a real possibility?
TH: In some generations that may happen. It could be as simple as Microsoft deciding to get out of the business without anyone else jumping in to be number two. It is always possible to create standards, as evidenced by the recent successes of DVD and the web, but it is hard work and in many situations the odds are stacked against it happening. There is no question it is

With *Army Men* 3DO kick started a torrent of multiformat green plastic warfare.





This is *Joe Montana Football* on Mega Drive. Several online sources state that Blue Skye developed the first *Joe Montana* game, when in fact it was EA. Trip and the ex-president of Sega have confirmed this.

"SONY IS A JUGGERNAUT COMPANY THAT WOULD BE HARD FOR ANYONE TO STOP"

a much harder thing to accomplish with consoles, and that is why it has never happened successfully.

g™: Have you considered working with formats besides mobile phones?
TH: I think a new brand or service has to initially get successfully established on one platform. After that, it may make sense to offer it on other platforms. *Tetris* made the Game Boy a first rate platform, but has succeeded in many forms. For now, Digital Chocolate has to show consumers that mobile is a first rate platform that does unique things, like keeping you socially connected when you're away from home. Later on, if a service has become a big success, I can imagine extending access to it from other client platforms including the PC.

g™: What are your other plans for the future?
TH: DChoc wants to make mobile a first-rate platform, not just a second rate console or TV. We think mobile is the social computer and the big dream is to not only have fun but also to hook up with friends in new ways. We're excited about 3G cell networks, Wi-Fi, better handsets, 3D graphics, and smartphones. It's all good.

g™: Awesome, glad to hear it. Thanks for answering our questions…
TH: No problem.



Under The Influence…

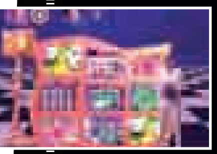
Trip had varying degrees of influence over many games that emerged from the EA stable. From a hands-off role to instrumental involvement, these include:

M.U.L.E. (Atari 400/800 – 1983)
The seminal multi-player videogame set on a small planet involved competition between four players who, while trying to beat each other, were required to work together for the sake of the colony and its economics.

Skate Or Die (C64, ZX Spectrum, Apple IIGS – 1987)
The very first game developed internally by EA – which Konami later ported to the NES. Before Tony Hawk became a household name, kids were competing in ramp, downhill and pool joust events in this classic skateboarding game.

John Madden Football (Apple II/C64 – 1988/89)
More than just the producer on the project, Trip Hawkins had direct involvement with the beginnings of the classic sporting franchise that sees it annually updated, improved and expanded to new consoles almost two decades later.

Twisted: The Game Show (3DO – 1993)



***Twisted* is also described by Trip as being one of his favourite games along with *M.U.L.E.*, which he still actually plays today, since they both have a great four-player element. An unusual quiz game that's just plain fun.**

The Hi-Def Revolution





THERE'S NO GETTING AROUND IT: HIGH DEFINITION IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS TO HIT CONSOLE GAMING IN THE LAST TEN YEARS. HIGH-RESOLUTION GRAPHICS WERE ONCE THE PRESERVE OF PC GAMERS WILLING TO SHELL OUT FOR THE PRIVILEGE OF ULTRA-SHARP, ULTRA-DETAILED VISUALS, BUT NOW, ANYONE WITH A COMPATIBLE TV AND A 360 CAN KICK BACK AND MARVEL AT THEM.

360 IS THE TIP OF THE ICEBERG; MARCH 2007 WILL SEE PS3 TOUCH DOWN, BRINGING WITH IT THE LAUDED 'TRUE HD' 1080P FORMAT. AND THIS HI-DEF REVOLUTION ISN'T LIMITED TO THE WORLD OF GAMES: SKY AND TELEWEST HAVE LAUNCHED THEIR OWN HDTV SERVICES, AND THE UK WILL ALSO SEE THE RELEASE OF TWO HD-COMPATIBLE DISC FORMATS IN THE RUN-UP TO CHRISTMAS, BRINGING HI-DEF MOVIES AND TV SHOWS INTO THE HOME.

SO WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU? IS THE EXTRA DETAIL OF HIGH DEFINITION REALLY WORTH EMPTYING YOUR WALLET FOR? READ ON AND FIND OUT…

WORDS: **SAM KIELDSEN**

We should probably begin by telling you what high definition actually is (apologies if we're teaching you to suck eggs here). The term refers to any video format that presents more detail than a standard-definition picture. The quality of standard definition differs depending on where you live. In the UK, the standard TV picture is made up of 576 vertical lines, and each frame of the image is scanned on to the screen in two passes – one for the odd lines, and one for the even – in a process known as 'interlaced scanning'. In the US and Japan, the standard picture is 480 lines, again interlaced – incidentally, this is why a lot of shoddily converted foreign-made games have black borders at the top and bottom of the screen when they are played in the UK, because they were made for lower quality TVs. There are currently three main hi-def formats: 720p, 1080i and 1080p. The latter isn't available at present (more on that later) but the others are becoming increasingly common.

720p is made up of 720 lines (1,280x720 pixels full resolution) and is scanned 'progressively' – this means that each frame is fully scanned on to the screen in one pass, not in two interlaced sweeps. The advantage of this is smoother movement; interlaced scanning can produce a stepped, jagged effect around the edges of objects during horizontal pans and movements, and a progressively scanned image avoids this. 1080i consists of 1,080 lines (1,920x1,080 pixels resolution) scanned in an 'interlaced' fashion. Therefore, despite offering substantially more detail than 720p, it's not necessarily regarded as a higher quality format. In general, 720p is regarded better for fast-moving content such as sport, while 1080i is supposedly more suited to movies.

In order to watch video in these formats, you need an HD source – such as an Xbox 360 or Sky HD box – and a compatible display device. The easiest way

to find a compatible display is to look for the black-and-white 'HD Ready' logo on the box or on the device itself. Any projector, television or monitor sporting this badge fulfils a number of criteria: it can display at least 720 horizontal lines natively, it can display both 720p and 1080i material, it has both digital and analogue HD-compatible connections, and the digital connection is able to decode High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection (HDCP, see HD Glossary) copy protection.

THAT LAST POINT is crucial – movie and TV studios may one day bring in a system that would 'hobble' any protected hi-def disc on a non-HDCP-compatible screen, basically reducing it to normal DVD quality. All High-Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI) ports are HDCP compatible, but the same is not true of Digital Visual Interface (DVI) connections – so be sure to check before you buy.

It's worth noting that an HD Ready device does not have to be able to display 1080i material natively (or 'line for line'), so many don't have a 1,920x1,080 resolution. In fact, only a very small number do – most LCDs have 1,366x768 resolutions and some plasmas have 1,024x768 panels.

The three main HD sources currently available are the Sky HD box, the Telewest TV Drive and Xbox 360. All are capable of outputting in both 720p and 1080i when hooked up to a compatible source using the correct type of connection such as a component video or Video Graphics Array (VGA) cable for a 360, or a component video or HDMI/DVI cable for the two TV boxes.

All Xbox 360 games are designed for 720p, and they should look better on most high-definition televisions in this format although they can be upscaled and interlaced for 1080i if you prefer – on the several HDTVs we tested our 360 on, there's very little difference in quality between the two modes. Sky, on the other hand, broadcasts everything in 1080i (even sport) and if you want you can force it to downscale and de-interlace this to 720p.

So how good is HD? Well, it's certainly a noticeable step up from standard-definition images – and this is particularly noticeable with Xbox 360, especially on a big screen. The Dashboard looks pin sharp in HD, and stick on something like *Call Of Duty 2* in 720p and you'll immediately notice the extra detail on your rifle and in the faces of your comrades… and everything else.

For the most part, Sky HD is similarly impressive in terms of the actual picture quality, but the programmes on offer are not, especially if you don't like sport. The fact that the Premiership will be rendered in glorious 1080i this season should be enough to convince most football fans of the service's merits, but otherwise the selection of two movie channels, one pay-per-view channel, Sky One HD and three documentary channels (as well as the BBC HD trial) seems rather limited given that you have to shell out at least £300 for the box and an extra £10 a month on top of your normal Sky subscription. Still, it's certainly a tantalising taste of things to come.

We've also had the chance to play with Toshiba's HD-A1 HD-DVD player, and it's a nice product that provides a subtle bump up in quality over standard DVD. Is HD-DVD worth the £500 or so it'll cost on launch? Probably not, unless you have a very large TV or a projector or lots and lots of spare cash lying around. Personally, we'd wait until it drops in price – as these things always do – or see how good Xbox 360's HD-DVD drive turns out to be (it'll probably cost around £100 to £150).

UPCOMING KIT LIKE the Xbox 360 HD-DVD drive add-on and PS3 will also offer a choice of formats, as will the standalone HD-DVD and Blu-ray disc players also due out before the end of the year. Again, 720p and 1080i are options, but PS3 and the Blu-ray players will also be 1080p compatible right from the get-go. HD-DVD is compatible with 1080p too, but the first generation of players will not give you this option.

1080p is the Holy Grail for HDTV formats, or at least that's what the manufacturers' marketing departments would have us believe. It has been famously described by Sony as



The 720p format is generally regarded as the best for viewing sports as it handles fast-moving content better.

Sky's HD digibox and controller. All you need now is an HD Ready TV and you're off.

'True HD' because it combines the advantages of both other formats: progressive scan and massive amounts of detail – around four times as much as a standard-definition image, in fact. As you might have guessed from the name, it's a 1,920x1,080 resolution picture scanned progressively.

While 1080p sources will be limited at first – there is currently no 1080p TV material broadcast anywhere in the world – the format could well go on to become the main standard in the future, which has led some to suggest that unless you actually go out and buy a 1080p-compatible screen now, you won't be fully future-proofed.

Of the televisions and projectors currently available, only a few are fully 1080p compatible, and because 1080p falls outside of the HD Ready required criteria, buying one can be a confusing process. For example, last year saw Philips launch an LCD that was marketed as a 1080p screen – but it's actually incompatible with a 1080p source. Instead, the TV's internal processing gubbins was able to make 1080i material progressive, hence '1080p'.

Our take on it is this: yes, 1080p looks better than 1080i or 720p, and yes, it may become a new minimum standard in the future, but certainly not in the near future. It would be commercial suicide for the likes of Sony and Panasonic, after spending the past two years pimping their expensive HD Ready screens and projectors, to now turn round to customers and tell them they should go out and spend even more ridiculous sums on another new TV. There's also the question of quality: most people won't be able to tell the difference between 1080i and 1080p unless they're viewing it on a large screen. So our advice is not to worry too much about 1080p compatibility. Unless you're the sort of well-heeled early adopter that needs to have the latest and greatest kit the moment it becomes available, a 720p/1080i screen should keep you more than HD happy.

Top HD Ready Gear

AFFORDABLE

Model: Toshiba 27WLT56
Size: 27-inch LCD TV
Price: £550
Further Details: www.gottatoshiba.com

Affordable hi-def flat screens don't come much better than this – it also has a digital terrestrial tuner.

Model: Samsung WS32Z419D
Size: 32-inch CRT TV
Price: £500
Further Details: www.samsung.com/uk

One of the few older CRT TVs certified HD Ready, the Samsung's an interesting alternative to LCD.

Model: JVC LT-32DX7
Size: 32-inch LCD TV
Price: £840
Further Details: www.jvc.co.uk

Bright, vivid colours and some truly booming sound make the JVC an excellent all-round choice.

MID-RANGE

Model: LG 42PC1D
Size: 42-inch plasma TV
Price: £1,000
Further Details: www.uk.lge.com

Yeah, we know that a grand isn't exactly pocket change, but you get a lot of TV screen for your money here.

Model: Panasonic TH-42PX60
Size: 42-inch plasma TV
Price: £1,400
Further Details: www.panasonic.co.uk

This 42-incher provides brilliantly detailed images – and it looks gorgeous when switched off too.



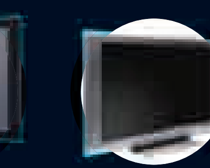
Model: Panasonic PT-AE900 LCD projector
Price: £1,000
Further Details: www.panasonic.co.uk

A projector that's as versatile as Freddie Flintoff, this supplies good images with both HD and SD sources.

LUXURY

Model: Pioneer PDP-5000EX
Size: 50-inch plasma
Price: £6,000
Further Details: www.pioneer.co.uk

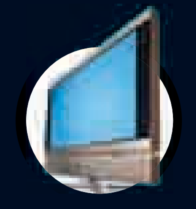
Huge 1080p-compatible screen from Pioneer. Costs a bomb but supplies the best plasma picture around.





Model: Sony KDL-46X2000
Size: 46-inch LCD TV
Price: £3,250
Further Details: www.sony.co.uk

Awesome-looking piece of design with an even better picture. And it's also compatible with 1080p.



Model: Loewe Individual
Size: 32-inch LCD TV
Price: £2,300
Further Details: www.loewe-uk.com

Beautifully designed model that can be individualised with coloured side-strips and different stands.

HD GLOSSARY

720p/1080i/1080p
The three main hi-def formats. The number refers to the vertical resolution and the letter to the scanning method.

BLU-RAY DISC
A 120mm diameter optical disc format able to carry HD video including 1080p. One dual-layer disc can hold up to 50GB of data. Requires a compatible player. All PS3 games will be on Blu-ray.

COMPONENT VIDEO
An analogue video connection that splits a picture into three constituent 'components'. Able to carry HD-quality images, but not those protected by HDCP.

HIGH-BANDWIDTH DIGITAL CONTENT PROTECTION (HDCP)
A form of Digital Rights Management that can control video transferred by HDMI or DVI in order to prevent it from being copied. HD Ready devices must be HDCP compliant.

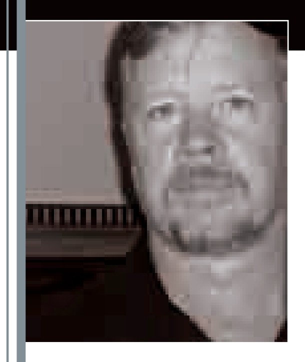
HD-DVD
A 120mm diameter optical disc format able to carry HD video including 1080p, and a rival to Blu-ray. Dual-layer HD-DVDs have a 30GB capacity.

HIGH-DEFINITION MULTIMEDIA INTERFACE (HDMI)
A small digital connection. In addition to carrying HD video up to 1080p quality, it can also carry multi-channel, high-resolution surround sound. Looks set to become the standard AV connection in the near future.

HD READY
A standard awarded to display devices able to display 720p and 1080i, in possession of component and DVI/HDMI connections and of a resolution with at least 720 lines.

UPCONVERTING/UPSCALING
Some DVD players can be made to 'upscale' standard DVD pictures to HD resolutions like 720p or 1080i. The results tend to look sharper and more vivid than regular DVD.

VIDEO GRAPHICS ARRAY (VGA)
An analogue VGA cable can carry high definition video, but is not commonly used in consumer electronics. Xbox 360 can be fitted with one that allows you to set the output to exactly match your TV's native resolution.



The Players

YOU HAVE A BLOCKBUSTING WWII FPS WITH A HUGE FOLLOWING AND BUDGET TO MATCH. SURELY THE GAME JUST NEEDS TO BE BIGGER, BETTER AND PRETTIER? TELL THAT TO ACTIVISION'S MILITARY ADVISOR, LT COLONEL HANK KEIRSEY…

ACTIVISION INC.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HANK KEIRSEY

WORDS: **BEN BIGGS**

If you're among the world's top-ten-grossing videogame publishers, who's on the recruitment list for your next big-budget-title-cum-series? A reputable development studio drawn from your own pool, a PR team with a talent for beguiling the media, and a marketing executive with the Midas touch are a given. So what about a retired Lieutenant Colonel with a piercing gaze and a flair for gifting the press with memorable quotes? You're throwing millions at this gig anyway, why not bring a bit more to the table than the apogee of your WWII FPS collection? How about some historical accuracy in the videogame business?

"Killing the bad guys, that's our business," states a candid Lt Colonel Hank Keirsey. As military advisor for Activision's acclaimed *Call Of Duty* series, you'd expect a more profound opening gambit, especially considering he has a bachelor's degree in military history from West Point Academy and a master's from Duke. But the soldier's bravado belies the Colonel's own beliefs and the authenticity he's applied to the *Call Of Duty* games. "One of the things I like about these games is that they're not only fun, they're engineered correctly. They're authentic and they tell the story in an indirect way that allows a generation of people who have never known the story, to learn the story."

Certainly, the popularity of the series can be attributed in part to the original historical angle given to each title. *Call Of Duty 3* takes the player through the Allied advance, post D-Day, from Normandy into Nazi-occupied Paris – no doubt a subject that at best is skirted around in the average GSCE history class. The Colonel likes to think that Activision has brought a more accessible medium of teaching history to a massive market, and that the prevalent ignorance in post-war generations is partly due to a culture of reticence among WWII veterans, especially German soldiers immediately following their 1945 surrender.

"They took the whole history of WWII and did the Vulcan mind-suck," Keirsey begins. "And nobody knows anything. They didn't even have any curiosity about asking because it's bad. The German soldier – he wasn't evil. He was just with a squad, trying to keep his buddies alive and do what his orders tell him to do. Think about it. These guys can't even talk about it. And they're labelled losers. And they're labelled Nazis. And they go home and their shit's all blown up. So you think, well, who got the raw deal on that one? You go back to the US and yet Brooklyn's still standing, Queens is up, Cleveland's looking pretty good. But Dresden's gone, Berlin's gone. Well now these guys are 80, they're suddenly realising they're not going to be around much longer and their grandkids don't know the story. So now they're all willing to tell their story."

War stories appear to be what the Colonel is most interested in, and recruiting an enthusiastic and charismatic veteran of the Gulf War with a brimming military contact book appears to be a smart move in gleaning game content from the jaded memories of veterans, "I like talking to these veterans, I'd pay money to do it," says Colonel Keirsey emphatically. With hindsight, Activision now encourages interviewing these fading relics of the last world war, but when the Colonel initially put the idea to the *Call Of Duty 3* publisher, it couldn't see the value in the detail veterans could provide. It was reluctant to fund the interviews, despite developer Treyarch's remonstrations. "There's some absolutely powerful shit and much of it gets put in this game," he begins, "the developer was keen on these interviews. Activision was a little bit soft on putting the money toward it 'cause you've gotta get a hi-def camera crew out there, you gotta fly them into Buffalo and… you know. Where are you putting your money?"

This is a familiar concept in the industry: the publisher can't justify the expense, and fails to see the long-term benefits in what it considers a superfluous investment, it then draws its purse strings, hamstringing the developer. Fortunately *COD3* got the extra attention it deserved and the game has certainly profited. It's testament to the clout the Colonel wields within Activision, and his involvement in the series, that he can coax funds from the fists of a publishing giant. And having been there from the start he's already survived the original series developer, Infinity Ward, and become an indispensable icon for the *Call Of Duty* games.

All games with an historical basis could benefit from a sage advisor. Unfortunately, it's not always financially viable and many have to rely on second-hand information. Activision is in a position of owning a franchise whose subject is still in living memory, and the Colonel is keen to push the accuracy of *COD3*. "I think the key thing that defines them is authenticity. That's the gift of this game. It's history and passing it on. We honour that generation."

Call Of Duty 3 is out on 360 and Wii at the end of this year, and on PS3 in March 2007. It is previewed on page 46.



"THINK ABOUT IT. THESE GUYS CAN'T EVEN TALK ABOUT IT. AND THEY'RE LABELLED LOSERS. AND THEY'RE LABELLED NAZIS. AND THEY GO HOME AND THEIR SHIT'S ALL BLOWN UP. SO YOU THINK, WELL, WHO GOT THE RAW DEAL ON THAT ONE?"

LIEUTENANT COLONEL HANK KEIRSEY

REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Scoring's a messy business when it comes to videogames, so we keep things as simple as possible here at games™. Marking out of a possible ten, a game that is decidedly average will score five – that doesn't necessarily mean it's bad, just that it doesn't do anything particularly special against its peers. We also refuse to bow to PR pressure, meaning that scores are our genuine opinion: we sing the praises of the great games and give the lesser ones the scorn they deserve. You might not always agree with us, but we're just trying to help – after all, everyone has an opinion, right?

REFERENCE KIT

All the PC content for the magazine is tested on the über-specced Alienware Area-51™ 7500 extreme performance desktop PC. For information on Alienware products, point your browsers to www.alienware.co.uk or call them freephone on 0800 279 9751.

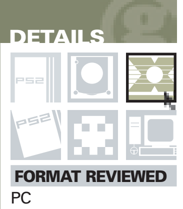



OPR-023
-023

The opening scene is remarkably similar to that of *Saving Private Ryan*.

A D-DAY OUT ON THE BEACH

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

OTHER FORMATS
Mobile

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Relic

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-8 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
2GHz Pentium 4/AMD Athlon XP, 512MB RAM, 64MB Graphics, 16-bit sound card

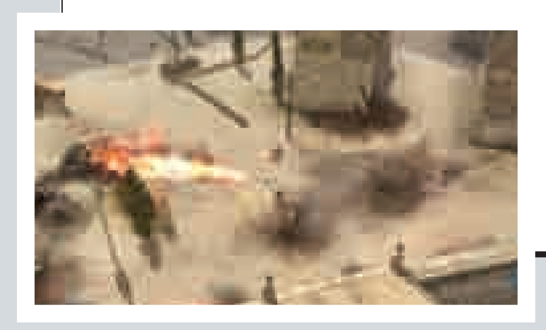
COMPANY OF HEROES

World War II. It's one of the most saturated facets of the videogame market, and a tough subject to bring any innovation to. You name the genre and a WWII theme has been moulded around it somehow. If it hasn't, it's probably in the pipeline – think *Guitar War Hero*. Well maybe not, but you know what we mean.

Real-time strategy dons the subject of war more comfortably than most and EA's Westwood Studios has the monopoly on RTS with the *Command & Conquer* series. So despite Relic's sturdy reputation for fantasy strategy games under THQ (*Warhammer 40,000*, *Impossible Creatures*), they're walking in the footsteps of giants with *Company Of Heroes*. It needed an angle to take the RTS where it has never been before. And that's exactly what it's done.

It's obvious from the outset that *Company Of Heroes* is heavily inspired by Hollywood's epic war stories. Its beautifully rendered introductory FMV features a D-Day landing that's uncannily similar to the opening scene of *Saving Private Ryan*, from the camera direction to the gore and graphic imagery in each frame. Spielberg's famous scene took the viewer past cinematic detachment and thrust them into the battle with the soldiers, forcing them to consider the conflict with unprecedented realism. There's been a lot of thought put behind this concept, and it neatly complements the ethos of *Company Of Heroes*. Relic takes this reality one step further by adding interactivity, and reinforces the idea by blending the final few seconds of the FMV that precedes each level into the start of the game.

Relic's attention to gameplay detail significantly deepens this experience. The Havok physics engine – common to so many first-person shooters that it's to the discredit of a modern FPS if it doesn't use it – has only recently been exploited by the real-time strategy genre. *Company Of Heroes* has seized this opportunity and implemented ragdoll physics and a completely destructible environment. Not that there won't be enough to keep you occupied in-game, but if you fancy taking a detour to utterly annihilate Cherbourg or any of the occupied French villages you encounter from one level



Flame thrower versus really squint tank commander. It's gonna be a long war.

MAKING WAR MOVIES

***Company Of Heroes* is set to ship with a movie-making tool in addition to the main game, which is appropriate considering its emphasis on dramatic FMV entrances to each level. As you're able cut to any angle, pan and zoom, there will be ample opportunity for gamers to create and recreate scenes from their favourite war films. Its potential has already been suggested by Relic itself with the *Saving Private Ryan* opening level, but we foresee enthusiastic fans taking this technology beyond that, especially considering Relic is opening the game up to modders. Expect a flurry of *Company Of Heroes* videos on YouTube in the coming months.**

The Havok physics and Essence 3D engine make beautiful bedfellows.



The engineers do all the scabby jobs regular soldiers won't touch.

Defend? We're sure you said raze, General. "Raze Cherbourg." Yes, that was it.

games™ MISSING LINK

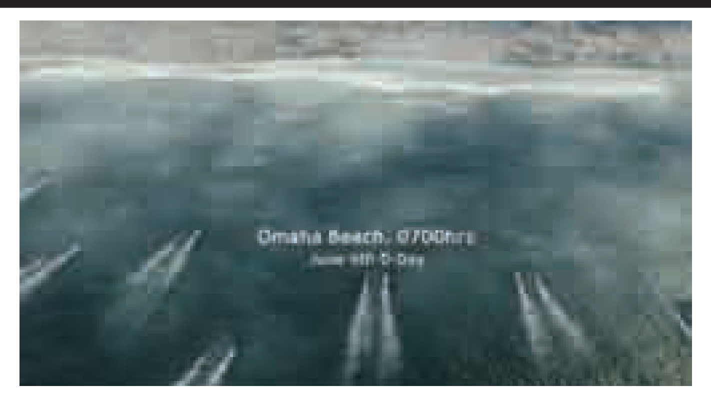
WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

FLAWED AI: Later *Command & Conquer* games let you issue commands such as guard duty on a specific area to any unit. Similar controls should have been implemented here.

to the next, you won't be penalised for it. What's more, it's a viscerally satisfying experience that we heartily recommend to anyone with an appetite for destruction. Entire blocks can be razed with engineer explosives, bulldozed into rubble with a battalion of tanks or blown to hell with a barrage of artillery. Even the ground is susceptible to damage, forming craters wherever a charge goes off, spewing dust into the sky. A solitary bugbear, however: in the carnage of an urban battle, the ragdoll corpses of soldiers that are tossed around by explosions don't persist more than a few seconds, disappearing shortly after their demise. Not that it detracts from this experience a great deal, but it would have greatly satisfied our morbid craving for detail to see bloody cadavers strewn about the area for the duration of the level.

Company Of Heroes manages to avoid falling into the category of 'average RTS' by defining a single foot unit as a squad of five soldiers. Not exactly a significant difference when taken at face value, but this has far-reaching strategic implications. Each unit, backed by sophisticated AI, usually acts well as a team; seeking the best cover for each waypoint you target and effectively engage the enemy. What this means is that, rather than micro-managing individuals within each squad as a frontline officer, you point each unit in the desired direction and allow the AI to manage the infinite detail of its trajectory. Instead

"THE INTRODUCTORY FMV TAKES THE VIEWER PAST CINEMATIC DETACHMENT AND THRUSTS THEM INTO THE BATTLE WITH THE SOLDIERS, FORCING THEM TO CONSIDER THE BATTLE WITH UNPRECEDENTED REALISM"



■ If you already thought the GI's already had it bad, they also had to get up really early.



■ The Jerries dished out poisoned ice cream by the bucketload.

of simplifying the game, this gives you the opportunity to see the big picture as a General and devise deeper strategies to win the war (read: complete the level) instead of focusing on individual skirmishes.

The importance of these broader strategies become more apparent as you progress. Each map is divided into zones controlled by either you or the enemy, indicated by a coloured area on the mini-map. Some mission objectives involve securing a specific zone by raising your flag at a specific point – which gives a certain tangibility to territory and your advance across the map. Seeing a friendly zone captured evokes a suitably anxious response, especially if the enemy has snuck behind your frontline and effectively cut you off from your base in doing so.

Major battle tactics have evolved far beyond the simplicity of the reign of a superior force. Vehicles, especially tanks, are more susceptible to damage when flanked, and Relic has also added three grades of defensive cover for all your units, indicated by a traffic-light trio of coloured shields. Red means your unit is exposed, amber means medium cover and green signifies heavy protection. Virtually every object has a cover value attributed to it, including trenches and dynamic landscape features such as explosive impact craters. Efficient use of cover can turn the tide of battle and prove especially useful on the harder difficulty settings. When commanding multiple units later on in the game, directing each unit to a waypoint with decent cover while you focus elsewhere on the map can prove crucial to them surviving an enemy ambush.

Unfortunately, you can't rely entirely upon the AI to take the most obvious and sensible course of action all the time. Each foot-soldier unit will invariably reach some kind of bottleneck along its trajectory at some point, whereupon you'll see the classic AI RTS reaction to such a situation: rather than individuals waiting their turn to move through the gap, they'll split from the group and seek another way round regardless of the length of the detour or whether it sends them to certain death. This is most apparent when sending squads through the trenches early on in the game; it can get quite frustrating if you don't keep tabs on them. Vehicles are solo units, so in that respect they are easier to manage, especially armoured tanks which will simply drive over or through any obstruction, but all units suffer from the same trigger-happy behaviour. Unless instructed otherwise, they will relentlessly pursue a single

FAQs

Q. DOES IT HAVE A MAP EDITOR?
Of course. Relic has even given mapmakers more scope for their creativity by opening the game to the modding scene.

Q. HISTORICALLY, HOW AUTHENTIC IS IT?
It follows the movement of the Allies across France quite closely. Relic has done its homework.

Q. ER, WHY D-DAY AGAIN?
Why not? It's a famous military manoeuvre that provides enough content for every developer to get their own bend on it.

COMMAND & CONQUER: GENERALS



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



JOINT TASK FORCE

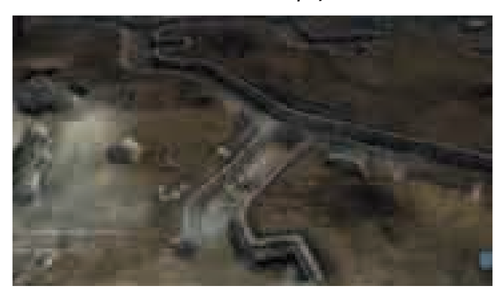


REAPING RESOURCES

The three resources necessary for deploying and creating new units and furnishing them with weapon upgrades are manpower, fuel and munitions. Manpower allows you to call in reinforcements up to the population cap and is usually the easiest to come by. The control of resources is often associated with a zone, and flagging it sometimes means securing a resource. However, you will only receive the income from the resource if its zone is connected to your base zone. On levels where income is limited and resources few and far between, you'll find yourself furiously defending your territory in an effort to prevent the enemy driving a wedge between you and your resources.



One of the few indestructible structures in *Company Of Heroes*. There are some things a 200mm shell can't annihilate.



It's best not to group units when advancing into the trenches, as they tend to wander off.

enemy unit en masse deep into enemy territory as it retreats to its base, leaving your own frontline undefended.

Similar AI issues arise with large-scale, close-quarter battles. Entire units, when focused on a more distant target, will occasionally completely disregard an enemy attacking from a relative distance of a foot or two away. To all intents and purposes, the range of your attacker makes no real difference to the damage you take, which is probably why the AI treats it with no more significance. But for all its emphasis on serious RTS warfare, this fairly superficial AI anomaly along with the more infuriating tracking issues does bring some minor ridicule to the experience. They're not encountered as frequently as in early RTSs, but these are logical AI errors that should have been ironed out at some point in the 15 years or so since the first popular RTS – Sensible Software's *Cannon Fodder* – was conceived.

But we're really picking at threads here. Strip away the cinematic impact, the destruction-fuelled hunger for power and all the back-slapping trench camaraderie from *Company Of Heroes*, and you're left with a series of strategic manoeuvres that require a sophisticated level of organisation and a fine degree of multi-tasking ability – pretty much the staple of every other decent RTS. So it's testament to Relic's experience, expertise and endeavours that it has managed to make *Company Of Heroes* so distinctive from any other wartime RTS. It's hardly enough to form a sub-genre, but it's refreshing enough to craft its own niche within the RTS market.

VERDICT 8/10

A SIDESTEP PAST THE MORASS OF AVERAGE RTSs

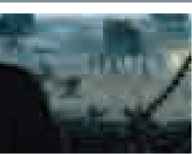
"IT'S TESTAMENT TO RELIC'S EXPERTISE THAT IT HAS MANAGED TO MAKE COMPANY OF HEROES SO DISTINCTIVE FROM ANY OTHER WARTIME RTS"



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

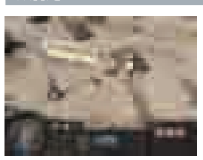
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 MINS



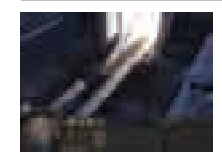
You've already been drawn in by the realistic re-enactment of the Omaha Beach landing. Set charges, snipe the machine gun nest, grenade the bunker… It's *Saving Private Ryan*.

4 HOURS



With a couple of tanks it's time to try out this destructible environment. It reduces to rubble but you wish these bloody Nazis would bugger off and leave you to your fun.

2 DAYS



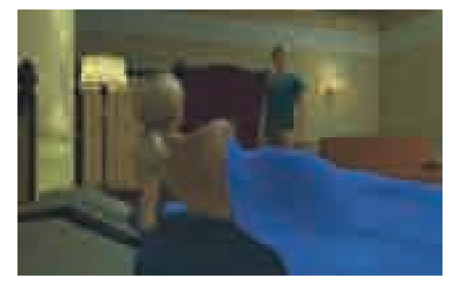
Surely there's still time for mindless destruction? Ah, no. Nazis have flanked your army and you must decommission a V2 rocket installation. Restart and get serious.



Everybody loves George. Almost as much as they love Raymond.



Grilling characters (about their ridiculous headwear) is normally the only way to progress.

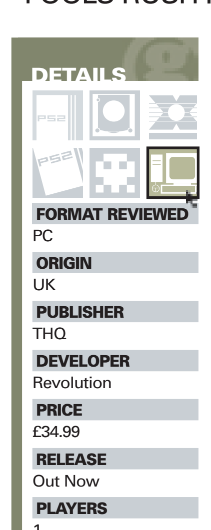


The romantic interplay between George and Anna Maria makes for some moments of high comedy.

BROKEN SWORD: THE ANGEL OF DEATH

"FOOLS RUSH IN WHERE ANGELS FEAR TO TREAD"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Revolution

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Revolution's commitment to the point-and-click genre is commendable, if a little misguided. Ignoring the recent conventions established by the likes of *Fahrenheit* and *Dreamfall*, *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death* is a cursor-driven, obscure-puzzle-laden, old-school adventure filled with character and charm. But by God is it miserable to play.

It all starts with the tiresome control. Lingering some way between a traditional point-and-click and a budget third-person action game, it's all too cumbersome to guide returning hero George Stobbart around the sparse environments. 2D and 3D have overlapped leaving an awkward join, and you'll be left begging for an analogue stick. Simply negotiating George through a doorway or down a stairwell causes nearly as much frustration as the ridiculous puzzles.

In fact 'nearly' is somewhat misleading. Nothing could ever match the sheer hair-pulling idiocy of *The Angel Of Death*'s tasks. The genre, and indeed the series, has always prided itself on lateral thinking and obscurity, but this takes it too far. The absurdity of its sequenced events (find this, put it here to activate this, then use the object you may have grabbed 20 minutes ago in an unrelated situation to open the door) means that unless you happen to be the developer, use a guide, or, most likely, simply click on every single object in an area until a solution magically appears, you'll be stuck for many an hour. In a world with Sky+, Xbox Live, 24-hour drinking, DVDs direct to your door and the never-ending delights of YouTube, do we really want to spend our free time stuck in claustrophobic videogame spaces arbitrarily clicking on walls?

The counter argument is that *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death* does not lead players by the hand, but rather encourages them to engage their brains and provides them with a healthy challenge. However, all it actually encourages is second-guessing the development team. Many a situation would have been tackled differently had we the choice or physical ability, but *The Angel Of Death* is just too restrictive. Perhaps it's the reason the genre has slowly died out: it has not found a way to evolve, or perhaps it's simply *The Angel Of Death*'s dogged and overly illogical sticking points. Nonetheless, the latest *Broken Sword* is the videogaming equivalent of severe depression – soul-sapping, brain-numbing boredom, deep sadness and incredible frustration. Not exactly *Sam & Max*, is it?

Yet amid the sheer misery of impenetrable puzzles and distinctly unpleasant controls is

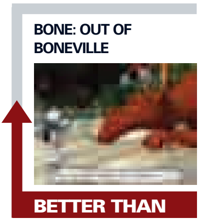
FAQs

Q. WRITTEN BY CHARLES CECIL?
Yes, and it retains his hallmarks of wit, style and class.

Q. IS IT AS GOOD AS THE ORIGINAL?
The move to 3D has hurt the genre, so, no.

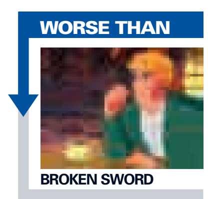
Q. THE DEATH OF THE POINT-AND-CLICK?
We hope not, but it's really not looking good.

BONE: OUT OF BONEVILLE

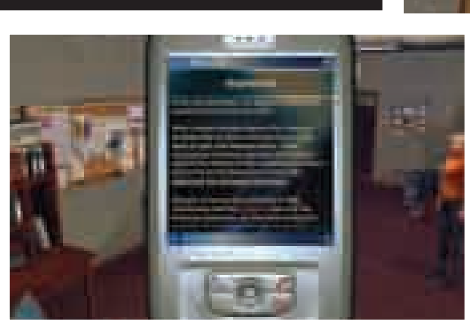


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BROKEN SWORD



Your PDA comes in handy when researching the mysteries of the Knights Templar.



Another of *The Angel Of Death*'s ludicrous puzzles flies straight over our heads.

Deciphering this manuscript takes time, effort, and a lot of arbitrary clicking.

an unmistakable charm. And it comes in the form of our good friend George. Despite the game's opening scene with acting which has more in common with a dry-stone wall than a dramatic set piece, George quickly evolves into a thoroughly likeable chap – as ever – with a caustic, acerbic wit and a fine line in pithy comebacks. He's gaming's Louis Theroux – constantly mocking all around him without ever letting on that he's doing it, and firmly straddling the line between cocky and confident. And thus, he's a lot of fun to be. At least he would be, if the game were just one big conversation without any suicide-inducing puzzles.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for his supporting cast. While the script is of a decent standard, the voice acting lets it down time and time again. For a game with a strong story element, and an enjoyable one at that, it's jarring to hear the stilted delivery of its characters. That's not enough to distract from the merriment of once again delving into the murky depths of the Knights Templar, but as gaming progresses, so must the standard of its acting.

And herein lies *Broken Sword: The Angel Of Death*'s greatest downfall: there's a fun story to be experienced here, but it's constantly halted by the lack of progression. Any notion of pace, suspension of disbelief or immersion is constantly shattered by obtuse puzzling, aimless wandering and wooden, static performances. If the future of the point-and-click is a move toward cinematic, narrative-led gaming, then the focus must be on the plot, not severe brain taxing. Allow us to make our own choices and create our own stories, or forget trying to ape the movies and focus on clever, humorous gameplay tasks with at least a few ounces of logic. Sadly, *Broken Sword* falls in between the two, forever lost in a battle for its own identity. Fahrenheit had the right idea after all.

Devout fans of the genre will still find pleasure in *Broken Sword 4*. Those willing to ignore the last ten years of gaming and accept its huge shortcomings will eventually be seduced by George's highly entertaining company. For the rest of us, it's a sad day for the point-and-click – a last, gurgled gasp for air as it drowns beneath the explosions and car chases of next-gen gaming. *The Angel Of Death*? A more appropriate name there could not have been.

games™

MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

OUT OF CONTROL: It would be less frustrating if you could negotiate the environments with a little less difficulty. Invisible walls, un-climbable knee-high ledges and impassable doors are not fun.

VERDICT 4/10

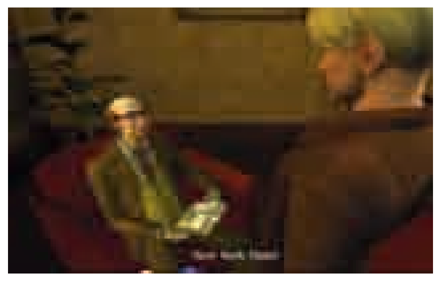
DISAPPOINTING AND IMMENSELY FRUSTRATING

HACK DADDY

Occasionally, George will have to use his trusty PDA to hack into databases and password-protected websites, which leads to an excellent puzzle mini-game. You have to channel a comms line through a number of nodes, routers and splitters, avoiding the evil squares that detect your nefarious wrongdoings, and end up at the destination computer. It's simple logic (unlike the rest of the game, "you have to close the window when he's DANCING?"), and a satisfying break from all the adventuring and wandering. In fact, George's PDA is used to good effect throughout the story, coming in handy for many a puzzle. Intelligent use of phones and PDAs in games – more of that please.



This guy plays host to one of the most confusing and elongated puzzles ever. If you work it out, then you're an absolute genius.



"Take this book in your left hand, but not before singing *Like A Virgin* while drinking a glass of water and hopping on your right leg."

A SLAM DUNK, OR HAS THE MARIO BRAND BEEN DILUTED FURTHER?

MARIO HOOPS: 3-ON-3

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
SquareEnix

PRICE
$39.99

RELEASE
10 November
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

It's amazing how, after all the running and jumping he does, and all the sports he plays (football, golf, tennis and now basketball), Mario still has that trademark paunch. But while purists might complain about his increasingly frequent appearances in non-platform games, most of us can simply enjoy what is a tremendous piece of handheld software.

It surprised many that SquareEnix was taking the helm for this latest Mario sporting adventure (to be known over here as *Mario Slam Basketball*) rather than the tried-and-trusted Camelot, who'd developed *Toadstool Tour* and *Power Tennis* for GameCube. Based on this evidence, however, perhaps Nintendo should consider offering the company more franchises, because the RPG expert has done a sterling job.

The game features a number of different modes, with the main Tournament style providing the meat of the gameplay. While it suffers from the AI malaise so prevalent in Mario sports titles – from utter ineptitude to blatant cheatiness – and one ice level which should have been rejected, it's fast-paced, fun and makes superb use of the touch screen.

Presented in a series of simple yet beautifully presented tutorials, you'll soon be manoeuvring around the court like a pro. Tapping the touch screen to move the ball away from an onrushing opponent works amazingly well, while blocks and steals are accomplished by simple slides up and down the screen. Occasionally you'll shoot when you mean to pass, but that's easily avoided after a bit of practice, and there's an option to revert to button controls for the touch screen phobic.

Tournaments are bolstered by some diverting multi-player extras, and there's a host of unlockable characters and different basketballs to use. Meanwhile, the overall presentation is exemplary – the graphics, in particular, are worthy of note, using 3D that would have been remarkable on N64, with some really attractive stages and spectacular special moves. The sound is your usual *Mario* fare – jaunty music and slightly repetitive voice samples abound.

From time to time you'll lose the ball as the screen fills with power-ups, and your team-mates sporadically verge on the useless, positioning themselves far too close to their markers. These are, however, minor niggles in what is an excellent Mario sports game, and yet another worthy addition to the increasingly impressive DS catalogue.



VERDICT 7/10

MARIO'S CV GETS ANOTHER ENJOYABLE ENTRY

AND1 STREETBALL



BETTER THAN

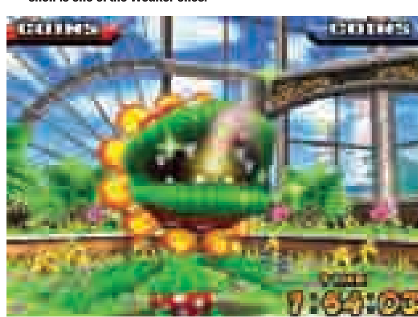
WORSE THAN



MARIO TENNIS



Power-ups enliven the action further, though a green shell is one of the weaker ones.



Slam dunks are best avoided when Petey Piranha's around. Don't ask, just trust us.



There's a nice attention to detail throughout *Mario Hoops* – witness Luigi's surfboard in the background.

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

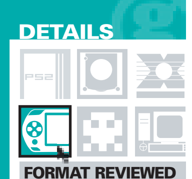
MULTI-BALL: Star of the package is a four-player power-up-grabbing maze romp reminiscent of *Mario Kart* Battle mode.

MAGE-IC JOHNSON: Unlockable *Final Fantasy* characters? Well, this is a SquareEnix game...

OMEGA'S FREEWARE GAME EXTENDED FOR PSP

EVERY EXTEND EXTRA

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Bandai/Namco Games

DEVELOPER
Q Entertainment

PRICE
¥5,040

RELEASE
27 October
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

What few realise, or at least aren't making a point of during discussion, is *Every Extend Extra* (hereafter *E3*) is an enhanced update of a freely available Japanese indie PC game (or Doujin soft to those who follow the scene), created by an iconic hobbyist developer known simply as Omega. Humble beginnings for what is one of PSP's most original titles, one that isn't easy to concisely define. Imagine the abstract concept of dominoes crossed with fireworks. Now imagine this concept realised and conceived as a videogame that plays like a cross between a puzzler and a shoot-'em-up. This is as simple an analogy as you'll find for *E3*.

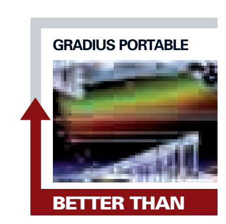
Your yellow-spiked avatar must be brought close to formations of enemies all travelling at a constant speed. This avatar can then be detonated, thereby blowing up said enemies. This sets off a chain reaction, where anything within the vicinity of an explosion will also blow up. But the number of avatars is finite and only 'extended' once certain points are reached; blow up too few enemies at a time and it's soon game over. Green enemies drop crystals which give you extra points, red enemy crystals increase speed and also enemy generation, while certain special foes drop yellow crystals to increase the time limit which is steadily dropping. There are also some brutally tough bosses which can only be damaged via particularly lengthy chain reactions.

E3 requires quick thinking, sharp reflexes, and speedy movement; it also sternly punishes impatient playing. Not every enemy needs destroying, and the best results come from carefully timing each detonation. It's not a style of gameplay which is easy to imagine, but it works so incredibly well in practice.

The only slight flaw that can be raised is the strong reliance on having 'quicken' items in order to generate large amounts of chainable enemies; getting hit once can make it difficult to achieve stated goals, and while creating chains of five is easy, creating chains of ten and upwards is far more challenging. You can begin a boss fight with ample avatars and time, but not enough quickens, and so will lose miserably. This at times heavy-handed difficulty will annoy those with less patience but, for anyone willing to practice and already with an inclination for shoot-'em-ups, it's manageable. *Every Extend Extra* is undeniably an ingenious game, but not easy to recommend for everyone simply due to being so different and very tough. Once mastered though, it's extremely satisfying, unusual and typically Mizuguchi. Never a bad thing.

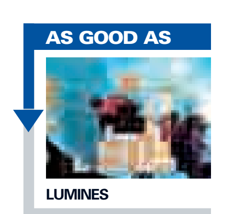
VERDICT 8/10
VERY ORIGINAL, VERY UNUSUAL, AND VERY GOOD

GRADIUS PORTABLE

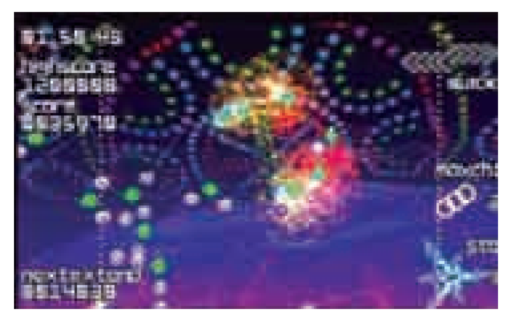


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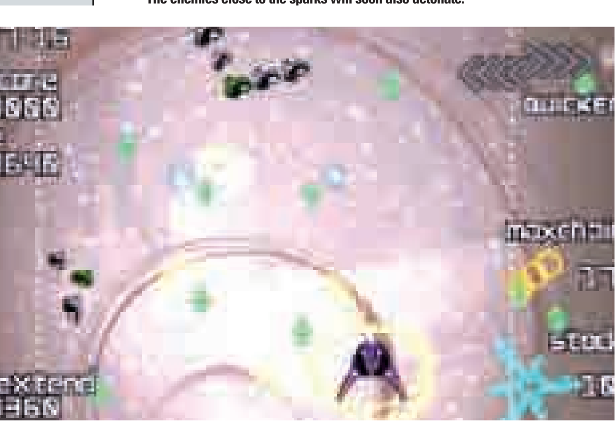
AS GOOD AS



LUMINES



This is the start of a beautiful chain reaction. The enemies close to the sparks will soon also detonate.

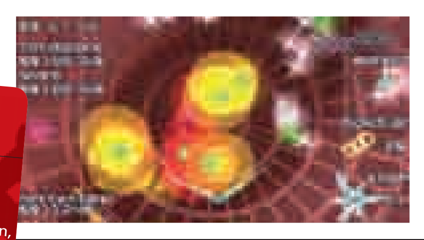


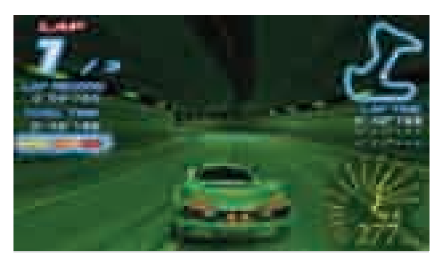


Each boss has an entirely different form and attack pattern. They all need to be hit by explosions from lengthy chains.

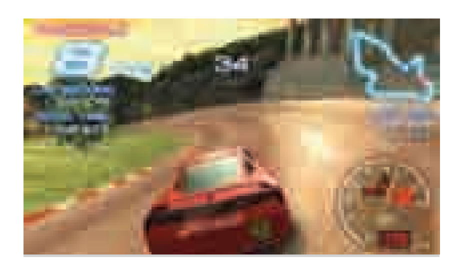


ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI: The man behind *Rez* and *Lumines* oversaw this enhancement.
NUMBER ONE: Alongside the enhanced version, the original is included for comparison.





It just wouldn't be *Ridge Racer* without tunnels.



Too much is the same as the last game to make this stand out.



The tactical use of boost is the key to winning races. As well as not crashing, of course.

CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

WHY OH WHY?: Up to eight players can participate in Wi-Fi races. While this may seem all well and good in theory, unfortunately it is almost impossible to actually organise in practise, as ever.

RIDGE RACER 2

MORE OF THE SAME

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Namco Bandai

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
13 October

PLAYERS
1-8

Upon inserting *Ridge Racer 2* – Namco's quick-to-market follow-up to the original PSP launch title – into the UMD drive, we actually had to check it was the correct game. So similar is it to its predecessor, even down to an identical minimalist white menu, identical music and even the subdued airport sound effects. This is less a sequel and more a full priced add-on pack.

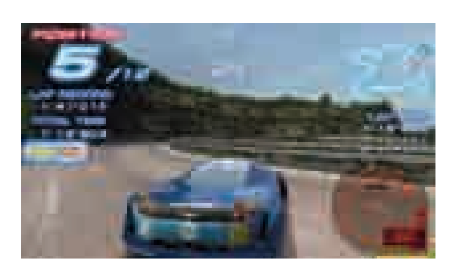
Using the same cars and tracks, the opening series of races is exactly as it was before, and that's unacceptable. Yes, the game's three times bigger, yes there are new tracks and cars, and yes it plays as well as it always did, but anyone who owns the original will be distraught after the first hour of this. Considering *Ridge Racer* itself was little more than a series best-of, recycling the same courses again is something of an insult.

As such, the first couple of hours of *Ridge Racer 2* are crushingly dull and stupefyingly easy. Experienced players will cruise through races with their eyes shut, longing for faster vehicles and untried tracks. However – and this is crucial – if you come to *Ridge Racer 2* having never played the original, it becomes a very different situation. The racing mechanics are enjoyable, with a focus on tactical boosting and smooth drift, the visuals are lovely, and due to the general air of class that *Ridge Racer* exudes, this sequel is one of the best racers on PSP.

All of which makes it a very tough game to score. Some may argue that *Pro Evo* changes very little from sequel to sequel, and they'd be right, but seasoned *Pro Evo* players will not be bored stiff by the first few hours of each new iteration. *Ridge Racer 2* alienates its fan base by demanding it replays large sections of a game it has long-since finished, and, while still a strong game, has to be marked down accordingly.

The two new race modes soften the blow slightly. Duel is a simple one-on-one race, with the opponent's car considerably stronger than your own, and survival is an exact copy of *Burnout's* elimination races. Also, the Arcade mode has been revamped to include checkpoints. It all adds much-needed variety, but in actuality the new modes are little more than side orders to the World Tour's rather dull main course.

Ridge Racer 2 is not a bad game; it is however, a lazy one. Those new to the series on PSP, or new to *Ridge Racer* itself, will find a pleasing, lengthy and entertaining racing experience, but for the rest of us it cannot be recommended. More effort required.



Of course, if you haven't played the original before this will prove a great racer.



VERDICT 6/10

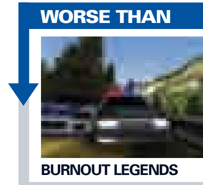
FAR TOO SIMILAR TO THE ORIGINAL



RIDGE RACER

JUST LIKE

WORSE THAN

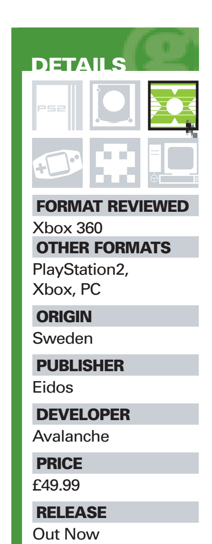


BURNOUT LEGENDS


eMag

JUST CAUSE

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, SAY HELLO TO RICO…



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox 360

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
Sweden

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Avalanche

PRICE
£49.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Technical superiority versus pure gameplay. It's a debate that will continue to rage long into the next generation. While the two are by no means mutually exclusive, the likes of *Oblivion* have proven that despite a stuttering frame-rate and some gaps in logic, sheer magnificence can still prevail. *Just Cause* is set to follow suit; the tale of hero Rico Rodriguez and his mission to liberate the fictional Caribbean island of San Esperito is buggy, illogical and at times, plain stupid. But strike us down if it isn't tremendous fun.

The immediate lazy comparison is *Grand Theft Auto*. There's an open world, vehicles to drive and missions to complete. To call *Just Cause* a facile clone of Rockstar's finest, though, would be to do it a great injustice. This is a game that stands on its own two feet; Avalanche's attempt at an open world not limited by radio stations and gangland murders. *Just Cause* is an action movie – a popcorn game drowned in explosions and exploitation – a stunt man's dream. If *GTA* is Brian De Palma, then *Just Cause* is Robert Rodriguez.

Of course, it's not Robert, but rather Snr Rico Rodriguez, an undercover CIA agent, who has been cast as *Just Cause*'s effervescent action hero. Dressed all in black, the man is Johnny Cash mixed with El Mariachi, with a keen line in weak dialogue, an unusual running style and an unprecedented ability to perform the impossible. A typical *Just Cause* scenario: Rico parachutes in from his Agency chopper, lands on a car travelling at high speeds, leaps onto another, swings through the door, kicks out the driver and speeds down the highway into the sunset. His penchant for death-defying leaps and acts of physical and logical infeasibility sum up *Just Cause*'s ethos – it's all about suspension of disbelief.

The second you begin questioning how Rico can jump through a helicopter's spinning rotor blades, why the police randomly drive into trees, and what unnatural force turned night into day when a cut-scene kicks in, you may as well switch the 360 off. After a while, it's just not worth asking. There are so many little problems that many will likely turn off after half an hour declaring the game 'broken'. However, while the likes of *Driv3r* and *True Crime: New York* contained misery-inducing technical issues that rendered them near unplayable, *Just Cause*'s minor glitches all add to the game's charm. Why can Rico jump off a 1,000-foot cliff on a bike and keep driving, without so much as a cloud of dust appearing upon landing? Just repeat the mantra: it's not worth asking.

And that's because there's far too much fun to be had in San Esperito to worry about such tedious matters. While Rodriguez stakes a decent

FAQs

Q. IS IT BETTER THAN *GTA*?
Not quite, but it's close, and refreshingly different.

Q. BUGGY?
Yes, it is. But never game-breakingly so.

Q. WHAT'S THE BEST VEHICLE?
We're quite fond of the military helicopter, to tell you the truth.

SAINTS ROW

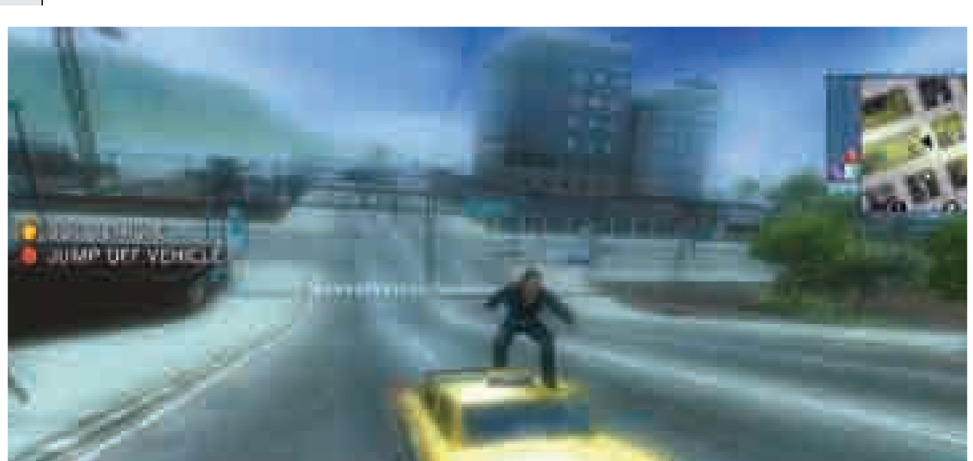


BETTER THAN

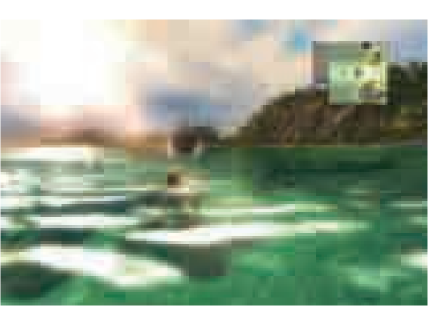
WORSE THAN



GTA: SAN ANDREAS



Just Cause introduces gamers to the little-known but growing phenomenon of cab surfing.



As well as the immense island, there are hundreds of square miles of water to explore.



Aerial vehicles are a joy to control: unfussy and simple, as with the ground-based machines.

The view from up above is simply stunning – the Avalanche Engine in full effect.

FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

BEAUTIFUL: San Esperito is an immeasurably gorgeous place. Best looking game yet? It's certainly up there. Quite how the frame-rate remains so consistent is a mystery.

claim to fame with his misogynistic charm, *Just Cause*'s real star is the island itself. Pre-release hype claimed the environment was half the size of Jamaica – a notion we initially laughed off as PR fluff. Imagine our surprise when, after traversing an area roughly the size of Vice City, we checked the map to discover we'd only explored about 1/15 of the whole area. The scale is phenomenal.

It's to Avalanche's credit that the game's frame-rate remains so consistent. Quite how it throws around that much sumptuous scenery without ever creaking is incredible. The rather bluntly titled 'Avalanche Engine' is a majestic beast, allowing for scope and beauty like you've never seen before. Other games may best *Just Cause* for character modelling and sheer detail, but nothing can beat its ambition. The environment is littered with tasks, also, from side-missions working with the guerrilla rebels or the Rioja drug cartel, standard collect-'em-ups and races, to simply time spent exploring, San Esperito is an adventurer's playground. By air, sea or land, it's an environment that begs to be travelled. Catching a San Esperito sunrise from the cockpit of a Lear jet is every bit as impactful as those first steps of Cyrodillic freedom.

Given *Just Cause*'s scale and openness, one may expect missions to be something of an afterthought, but instead the (rather dreadful) plot throws up a variety of tasks – all of which involve explosions… and Eighties Mexican rock music. Players have the freedom to undertake their objectives however they see fit, be it blowing up rocket fuel aboard a moving train or assassinating a crime lord during a WMD exposition, resulting in tasks that place the emphasis on the experience rather than the challenge.

Combat is never more than perfunctory, with a solid auto targeting system and infinite bullets for your twin pistols. During the eight or so hours of story missions, it's likely that Rodriguez will have murdered at least 1,000 policemen, militia and civilians, with absolutely no remorse. Perhaps *Just Cause* is a savage attack on the US government and its foreign policy. Or perhaps it's just a mindless videogame that wants players to have as much fun as possible. Whatever your take on it, the outcome is the same – pure entertainment.

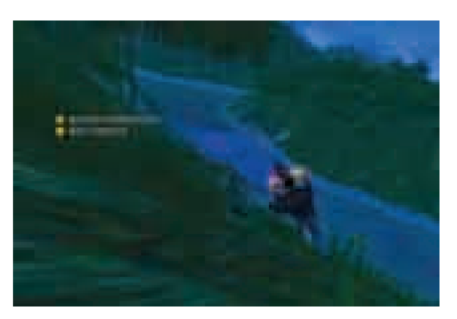
As ambitious a project as *Just Cause* is, lives will not be changed by its presence. It's not pushing the medium forward – its nonsensical AI and air of illogical daftness put paid to that – and it's not going to dispel the conservative idea that videogaming is an asinine pastime. No, Avalanche's greatest achievement is that it has created an open, vehicle-based videogame that does not feel like *GTA* in any way, shape or form, be it thematically or mechanically. This is the birth of a new franchise – a buggy, daft, hilarious and joyous franchise. Anyone desperate for some old-fashioned fun to break up the po-faced seriousness of the next generation need look no further than Rico.

VERDICT 8/10

A MAMMOTH ACHIEVEMENT MARRED ONLY BY BUGS

VIVA LA REVOLUCION

San Esperito is littered with side-missions, split between working for the Rioja drug cartel and the guerrilla rebels. When working with the guerrillas, you'll often be tasked with 'liberating' one of the many villages. As this is *Just Cause*, subtlety is hurled emphatically out of the window. You simply have to murder anyone remotely 'official' looking in the town, before capturing its flag. It's rarely difficult given Rico's accuracy with bullets, but you can't help but feel guilty after slaughtering hundreds of people for a political agenda. Oh well, at least it's fun.



Hurtling down a hill on a bike? The options are there: deploy parachute or exit vehicle? Hmm…



The physics engine is not quite as robust as that of *Saints Row*, but it's close.

CALL OF JUAREZ

"THERE'S A SNAKE IN MY BOOT!"

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Poland

PUBLISHER
Ascaron

DEVELOPER
Techland

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

MINIMUM SPEC
Pentium 4/AMD Athlon, 512MB RAM, 128MB graphics, 16-bit sound card

It takes a brave developer to attempt to make a game that's set in the Wild West. Although there have been thousands of movies set in the original frontier, it seems that videogame players would much rather play in a world of aliens or orcs and goblins than adopt the role of a virtual Lee Van Cleef. There have been only a handful of videogame Westerns in the last decade and the best of them achieved only moderate success at best. Techland, the developer of *Call Of Juarez*, has thrown caution to the wind, however, and braved the risky genre despite the obvious disinterest.

Although *Call Of Juarez* is unlikely to break the 'curse' of the Western genre, it does make good use of the source material and deserves to be played by fans of the style. Name any of the conventions of Western movies, and chances are high that they'll crop up somewhere in this game, whether they be in the plot or the game mechanics. Techland hasn't just taken an FPS engine and wrapped it in a familiar skin; it's taken every care to include weapons, scenarios and characters that act and react exactly as you would expect in this kind of world. Revolvers can be dual-wielded or single-wielded in Quick Fire mode (think Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful Of Dollars*), whips can be used to attack or to swing from branches and one of the two playable characters can even preach from his Bible at the click of a mouse button. Those gamers who love Westerns will find a lot to enjoy here.

The game is structured into two interweaving stories as the player alternates control between two contrasting protagonists. The first is Billy: a wanted man wrongly accused of murdering a family of farmers. The second is Ray: the local reverend who just so happens to be an ex-gunfighter. Each chapter shifts control between the two characters as Billy flees for safety and Reverend Ray follows his trail. As each character is thrown into different circumstances and has slightly different weapons and abilities, each chapter naturally forces the player into almost opposite types of gameplay. Billy will spend most of his time sneaking around, hiding in the shadows and using his whip to swing about while Ray will find himself in a lot more shoot-outs and showdowns.

The rampaging evangelist Ray has a take-no-prisoners approach to gun fighting that makes him a joy to play as, and it's when in control of him that the game is at its best. His levels often see him taking part in the sort of epic shoot-outs that would be the centrepiece of any great film, and his obligatory but well

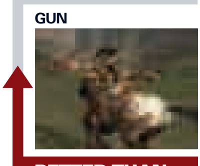
FAQs

Q. WHAT'S THE BEST WEAPON?
We have a soft spot for the Bible, but the whip is very useful in an Indiana Jones sort of way.

Q. CAN YOU WHIP THE HORSES?
Sadly not, *Call Of Juarez* has a policy that innocents, horses and corpses must not come to any harm.

Q. WHY'S THAT?
We're not sure to be honest. Maybe it's something to do with those 'morals' we hear so much about.

GUN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN





HALF-LIFE 2

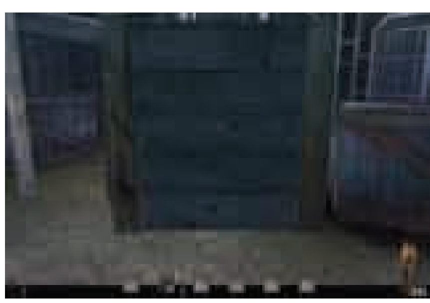
games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

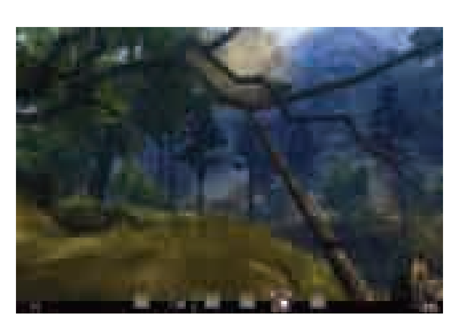
HIDE AND SEEK: As is the fashion these days, *Call Of Juarez* unnecessarily bolts the stealth genre onto a game that worked perfectly well without it. Really shouldn't have bothered.



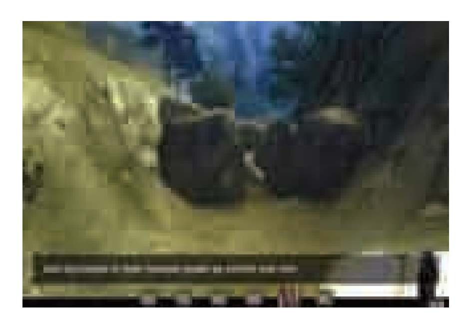
We wish this were possible in every game.



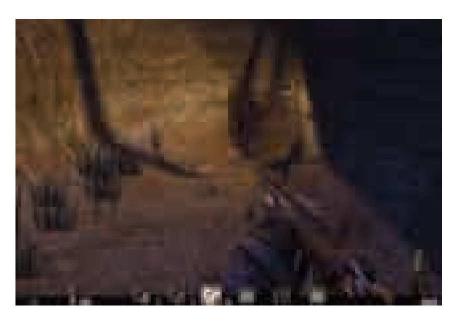
Carrying boxes plays havoc with your vision in *Call Of Juarez*.



The whip is essential for traversing some levels.



Yes, the game even features some very stylish boulders. Nice.



Despite moments of excitement, *Juarez* can get a tad dull.

implemented bullet-time ability adds tension and a sense of satisfaction to the drama. His interaction with the scenery – push a cart full of fuel into a building to blow it up or hide behind a rolling mine car for cover, for example – further adds to the feeling of actually being inside a good old-fashioned Western.

Billy, on the other hand, is not as much fun to play as. Although he does spend a little time peering down the barrel of a gun, the vast majority of his play time is occupied with stealth and infiltration missions. The first-person perspective proves to be mostly disastrous in the stealth missions as it is very difficult to see where enemies and goals are, which often means having to restart levels over and over when Billy is inevitably caught by an off-screen enemy. Likewise, on the occasions when boxes must be piled together to reach roofs and windows, the first-person view is obscured by the very items that the game forces Billy to pick up.

So, this is a game of two halves: one a highly enjoyable series of extravagant shoot-outs and the other a tedious crawl through two genres that just weren't made to work together. Any fun to be had from *Call Of Juarez* will unfortunately come at the expense of playing through half a game that often feels like more of a chore than the other half. It's the videogame equivalent of eating all your greens if you want some tasty pudding.

When this game is on form however, there's no denying that it can be tremendous fun. Hiding behind barrels and popping out to fire a hot ball of lead into a sleazy varmint's face or lobbing a lamp into a stagecoach and watching the scorched bandits evacuate in panic is about as satisfying as a Western videogame can get, and in moments like these *Call Of Juarez* excels. Just don't expect such a wild ride the entire time.

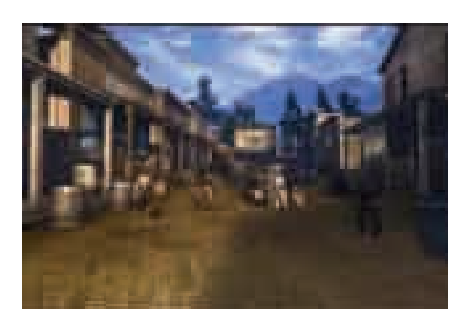


VERDICT 7/10

TOUCHES OF BRILLIANCE, BUT LEVELS ARE TIRESOME

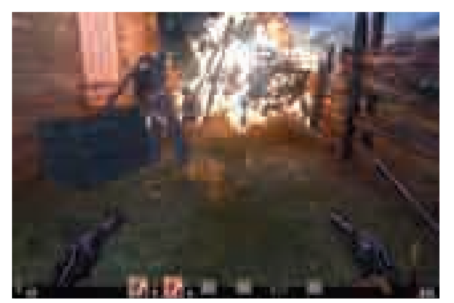
HALLOWED BE THY NAME

In any other game, the fact that the second playable character, Ray, is a preacher would be a throwaway detail – not in *Call Of Juarez*. When the player first gains control of this man of the cloth the only 'weapon' at his disposal is the Good Book. It's not long before Ray picks up a more destructive weapon, but the Bible does have its uses. Wield the book and click the mouse button and Ray will read from the text, which has the divine ability to confuse his opponents. He can even dual-wield a pistol and Bible for added retribution. Good Lord!

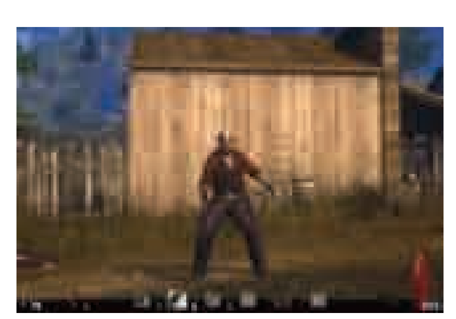


Poland brought us *Call Of Juarez* and God saw that it was… not great.





Buckets of water can be thrown on fires to put them out.



Quick-draw shoot-outs are some of the most difficult parts of *Juarez*.



Use Concentration mode (read: bullet time) in sticky situations like this.

PARAWORLD

WHERE PARALLEL DIMENSIONS, DINOSAURS AND STRATEGY GAMES COLLIDE

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Germany

PUBLISHER
Deep Silver

DEVELOPER
SEK

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 2000/XP, Pentium with 1.6GHz or equivalent, 512 MB RAM, DirectX9 compatible graphics card, 128MB Graphics RAM,

There's a school of thought that says plots don't really have a place in games any more, and it seems to be gaining ground. The question is, if a game was based on a strong enough idea then would it be better to have some cheesy, strung-together narrative that barely holds, or no plot at all? Games like *ParaWorld* don't help matters. A perfectly strong concept and some excellent innovations coated in a sickly sweet, hole-ridden story. It doesn't help either that several revisions seem to have taken place during this game's long development that have eaten even greater chunks out of the plot. The dialogue is even worse. Although set some time in the late 19th Century, one of our heroes, Anthony Cole, inexplicably refers to his colleagues as Bro and Peeps. These are the most obvious flaws in the game, but whether or not they detract from the gameplay is highly debatable.

ParaWorld stands perfectly well on its own as a solid, if a little plodding, RTS game with some neat touches, particularly in the selection and development of units. The plot that we have to put up with revolves around three 19th Century scientists who, having discovered evidence of a parallel world, are sent to investigate. They become stranded and embroiled in a tribal war between three rival factions of *ParaWorld* with seemingly no way to return home. Some room for conspiracy theories and a few shady characters offering you 'assistance' have been thrown in for good measure. All you really need to know is there are dinosaurs… lots of dinosaurs.

The dino-related units are quite imaginative, if a little reminiscent of animal troops from *The Lord Of The Rings* licences. It's not every day that you get to use a Brachiosaurus catapult on a band of marauding mercenaries. It makes a pleasant change to cannons and tanks, but that doesn't mean that it's original in anything other than theory. What is quite unique is the drop-down unit's menu that gives you an excellent overview of your manpower. It's separated into ranks and utilises a pyramid system that allows levelling up of only a certain number of units. Each rank has fewer spaces, so choosing the unit that will be most beneficial to upgrade is as tactically important as what path you choose when invading an enemy base.

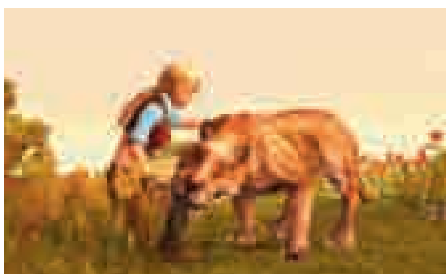
Despite this clever way of showing and controlling the development of your troops, the growth trees of establishing bases and then upgrading them is a tedious affair that only regular RTS players will want to persevere with. It's the typical system of collecting resources like wood, stone and food and building up various offensive and defensive structures, usually with the ultimate intention of wiping out the opposition. And while there are 50 different animals, most

FAQs

Q. INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS?
Unfortunately not, but neutral dinosaurs do roam around and will attack when provoked.

Q. DOES THE DAY/NIGHT CYCLE AFFECT THE GAME?
Again, it affects the neutral dino's, making them more or less aggressive depending on time.

Q. SO IS IT WORTH FIGHTING THEM?
Killing any unit, whether neutral or enemy, earns you skulls that can be exchanged for upgrades.



Neutral animals roam *ParaWorld* and won't harm you if you leave them be; some may even join you.

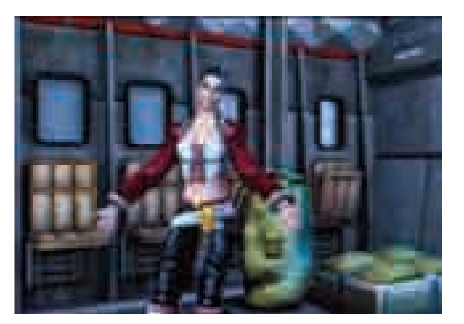




The Triceratops is a fearsome adversary that should not be underestimated; it's just a shame it takes so long to get one.

IMAGINE THAT

Throwing dinosaurs and other ancient animals into an RTS could have been done very lazily, but SEK has gone to the trouble of conceiving clever uses for every animal. Saber-toothed tigers and wild boars are ridden like horses, giant sea turtles act as troop carriers and Triceratops act like tanks. The three tribes are equally varied, each having their own styles of play. For instance, the Norsemen are your typical real-time strategy tribe that build fortifications, while the Dustriders act as nomads with mobile bases built for landscapes with sparse resources. Both excellent ways to keep gameplay evolving and changing.



Ada Loven is your guide in *ParaWorld*, but is she telling you the whole truth?

of which are dinosaurs, the very best or at least the most anticipated take an age to earn. Don't go into this game expecting T-rex fights and charging mammoths straight from the off. It takes time and a great deal of effort to reach those giddy heights.

In the meantime, additional bonuses in the form of artefacts (usually treasure chests) can be found scattered about, and these bestow additional strength upon the group carrying them. That could be you or the enemy. Once again it's not original, but the artefacts can change hands numerous times during the course of a campaign as well as when battling online. The multi-player functions are numerous and often more satisfying than the single-player campaigns. There are 26 maps for up eight players, and three different battle modes that offer varying challenges to those competing. While Deathmatch is a standard Versus mode, and Domination is a kind of flag-capture game, Defender is an all-on-one match that gives the single player greater resources than his attackers, but obviously leaves him greatly outnumbered.



games™ MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

BEDTIME STORIES: The plot has more holes than a Swiss cheese sandwich.

DINO DILEMMA: Plenty of dinosaurs, but it takes forever to get them.

The Day/Night cycle really helps emphasise the brilliant colour schemes used to create each game map.

ParaWorld has plenty to offer and, as you can see, it possesses a Monet-esque palette which gives every level a unique seasonal feel. Every leaf of every tree has been individually created (a fact that would have been wasted were it not for the ability to zoom in the game camera). The day/night cycle will help to remind you of this fact from time to time. As a whole the game doesn't push the boundaries of graphical excellence, but the vast number of colours and tones add a beautiful backdrop to the game; it's nice to have something to look at while you wait for your town hall to level up again. *ParaWorld* remains a mixed bag of positives and negatives, with all the building blocks of a great RTS stuck together with shoddy glue, making it a far less fulfilling experience than it should be.



VERDICT 6/10

LARGELY AVERAGE WITH SOME CLEVER ELEMENTS

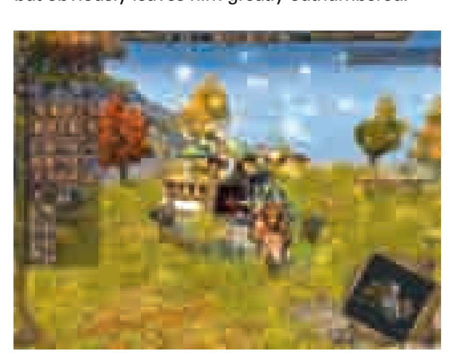


PRAETORIANS

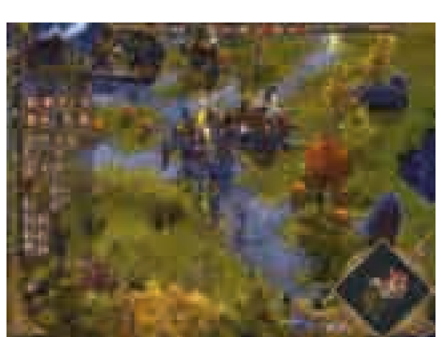
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

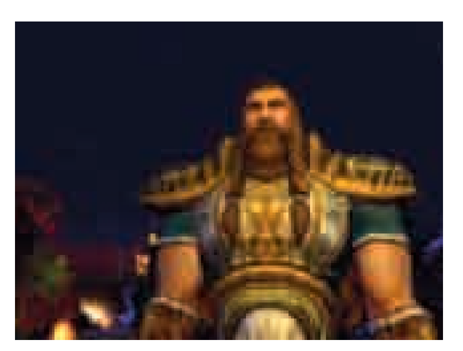
BATTLE FOR MIDDLE EARTH II



The animals can be used as very novel vehicles if you fancy.



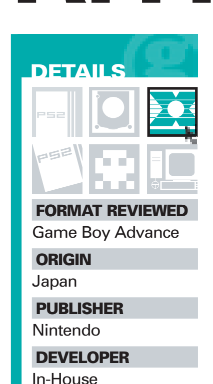
There are several different Battle modes to choose from.



Graphically, *ParaWorld* doesn't reach new heights but it is easy on the eye.

THE WARIOWARE TEAM BURSTS INTO SONG

RHYTHM TENGOKU



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥3,800

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Some developers have certain trademarks that can be seen throughout their catalogues. From Software, for example, is crazy for mechs while Nippon Ichi's games are filled with more numbers than Carol Vorderman's oversized brain. Similarly, the *WarioWare* team's work is instantly recognisable in *Rhythm Tengoku* – how many other developers can squeeze onion-shaving, tap-dancing chimps and calligraphy into the same title? The game even adopts the same oh-so-basic graphical style as the *Wario* titles in places, focusing on the rhythm-action gameplay rather than visual flair. To all intents and purposes, *Rhythm Tengoku* is a *WarioWare* title, only with Mario's portly nemesis replaced with a focus on music that makes Jools Holland look like a slacker.

Despite the fact that there are nowhere near the number of mini-games on offer as *WarioWare* tends to serve up, *Tengoku* has a few tricks of its own up its sleeve. 40 different activities are split up into categories of five, each path culminating in a longer remix stage that combines all the games you've just played into a single musical adventure. While a lot of the mini-games are great fun on their own, its these remix levels that really show what *Rhythm Tengoku* is all about – testing reflexes, memory and timing while trying to distract you with some truly bizarre visuals. And simple as the games may appear, many require a level of dexterity seldom demanded by a handheld title, especially as you progress into the latter half of the game. Later remix levels go back to older stages, one even incorporates most of the elements in the entire game into one sonic jamboree.

Where the *WarioWare* titles have modes that incorporate all the daft little games that you can go back to time and again, *Tengoku* isn't blessed with such replayability in its main modes. Aside from the remixes, you'll be unlikely to return to many of the single games once you have the medal required to unlock the bonus content. But this extra content will keep you going beyond the basic gameplay – a couple of entertaining mini-games and an insanely tricky drum lesson mode will put a smile on your face. While DS may have long-since usurped GBA in terms of sales, games like *Rhythm Tengoku* prove that there's still life in the ageing handheld yet. The fun may be short-lived, but while it lasts, *Tengoku* is a charming musical delight that can be enjoyed by anyone.

VERDICT 7/10
LOVABLE AND UNIQUE BUT LACKING SUBSTANCE

games™
FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
WICKED GAME: Despite following the classic *WarioWare* formula, *Tengoku's* emphasis on musical games and its wonderful Remix stages make it the 'Pass The GBA' game of choice for 2006.

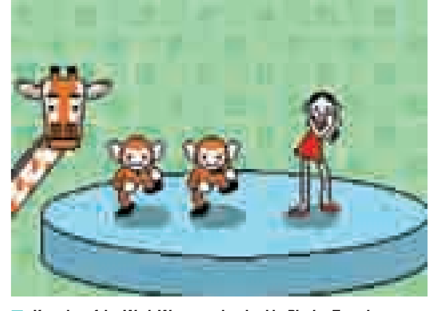
WARIOWARE: TOUCHED!



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN



Knowing of the *WarioWare* team involved in *Rhythm Tengoku*, tap-dancing chimps come as no surprise.





The graphics are uncomplicated, but it's the gameplay that makes *Tengoku* shine.


eMag

YOU WIN SOME, LOSE SOME, AND WRECK SOME

GTR 2



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Sweden

PUBLISHER
10tacle Studios

DEVELOPER
SimBin Development

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1 (2+ Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
Microsoft Windows 2000, XP Home, 1.8 GHz Intel Pentium IV or 100% compatible, 512 MB RAM, 1.7 GB free hard disk space, DirectX 8.1 compatible graphics card (and sound card) with 64 MB memory, DirectX Version: 9.0c

There is little more frightening or exhilarating than an authentic racing simulation. For years PC gamers have been blessed with a fine stable of console-wary titles, be it in the world of Formula 1, NASCAR or Le Mans. Only *Forza Motorsport* has successfully delivered this anally adored niche market to the console sector, and while expectations are rightly high for a repeat performance with its sequel, it is the successor to 2005's victorious *GTR: FIA Racing* game that's on show this month. And what a show it's putting on.

If you've failed to be won over by racing simulations to date, then there's little point reading on, but if like many, you live for speed and thrive on controlling something that is out of control, then welcome to your next purchase. Featuring over 140 accurately modelled cars including all of the 2003 and 2004 cars from the GT, NGT and 24h classes – think Ferrari 360s, Dodge Vipers and Porsche GT3s and so on – more than 19 officially licensed tracks, 40 custom events and full 2003 and 2004 championships and you begin to understand the depth of what's involved. *GTR 2*'s detail goes far deeper however, with all manner of tweaks and tinkering to your car's set up, your race tactics and more. It's a car enthusiast's dream.

While variety is important, it's the AI, physics, damage and engine performance on the track that is the most impressive. *GTR 2* is a thrilling driving experience from start to finish. The control, feeling of speed, danger and delight is truly breathtaking, especially when played in the cockpit view, where every bump in the road is felt and every corner results in perspiration. As you'd expect, *GTR 2* punishes careless driving, rewards skill over luck and demands your devoted attention at all times. Powersliding haphazardly around hairpins this is not. Mercifully for any novices among you, there are 142 challenges/tutorials to help, plus driving theory 101.

While the graphics may lack the visual sparkle of a next-gen *PGR3* or *Forza 2*, they are still impressive – as is the audio recorded directly from the actual race cars no less – and never more so than when utilised with the fully dynamic weather effects. *GTR 2* is a serious driver's utopia and an experience unrivalled by any other PC racing game to date. The boys and girls at SimBin Development certainly know how racing games should tick, and we thank them for it.

VERDICT 8/10
SURPASSES THE ORIGINAL AND THE COMPETITION

GTR: FIA GT RACING GAME



BETTER THAN

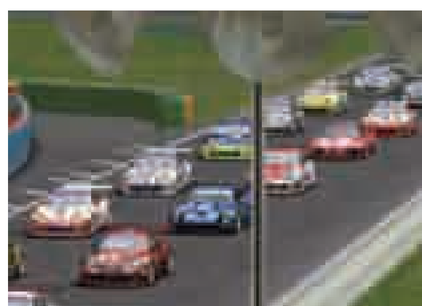
AS GOOD AS



FORZA MOTORSPORT



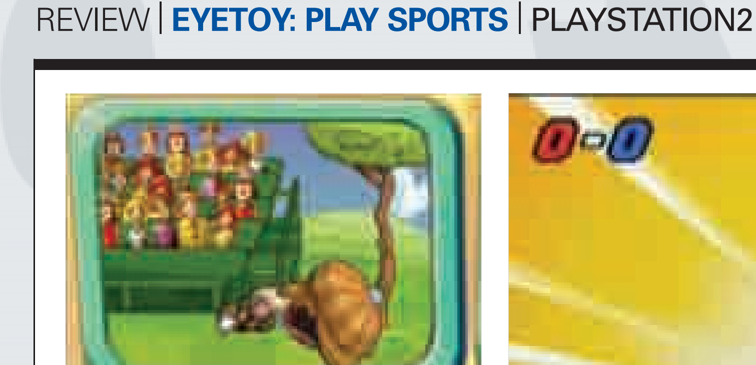
The cockpit view completes the illusion of this racing simulation as the feeling of natural speed and in-car effects is quite intoxicating.



And they're off. The Replay mode provides especially lush viewing, even more so with a grid chock-full of track hungry racing cars.



The details of the cars are incredible, and with a high-performance PC you'll find the hours pass faster than a McLaren can go from 0-60.







With Photo Finish you can clearly see which horse came first.



With a leg that skinny, we can only assume this is Peter Crouch.

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

FAST AND FURIOUS: Most games are over in less than a minute, some closer to 15 seconds.

SPORTING WISDOM: One or two mini-games even have you testing your maths skills.

EYETOY: PLAY SPORTS

AND YOU'LL FEEL LIKE YOU HAVE DONE AFTERWARDS…

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Europe

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
Kuju Brighton

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
3 November

PLAYERS
1-8

If there's one thing EyeToy games are good for, it's showing how grotesquely unfit you are. *Sports* is probably even better than the previous *Play* titles for highlighting that, given that the majority of its vast number of mini-games are almost absurdly physical, and some frighteningly demanding on the body. After a particularly vigorous session of arm waving, ducking, jumping and diving, you feel like you've been given a full body workout.

Another thing that EyeToy titles are pretty good for, is parties. As with every EyeToy title, the more people involved the merrier. Kuju has done its best to cater for the lone player, with several mini-games against the clock, or with a finite number of 'lives', but it's when you have competition that the fun really starts. There are more games than ever before – the total dwarfing that of number three in the series – and they tend to be shorter and more concentrated. It's the frenetic *WarioWare* of the EyeToy franchise, and in many ways is all the better for it.

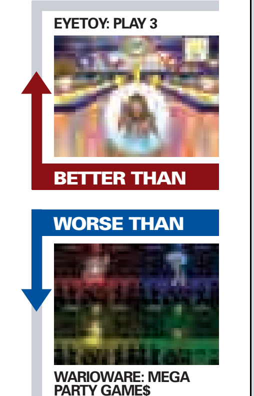
However, there's one last thing that most EyeToy games are ideal for, and that's shallow, limited entertainment which is ultimately disappointing given the potential of the technology used. There are flashes of inspiration, and some ideas that work really well (keepie uppie is a particular highlight, while the different versus mode setups are interesting and well-presented) but the overall feeling is of 'been there, done that'. If you've played previous EyeToy titles, then the actions involved in almost all the mini-games are going to seem far too familiar. Too many stages can be navigated successfully by simply waving your arms as much as possible, and those that try something a little more technical are hamstrung by occasionally dodgy camera recognition. The difficulty level swings more wildly than a Ben Thatcher elbow, while some of the activities bear a rather tenuous link to sport at best – unless Kuju knows something we don't and eating contests are soon to be unveiled as an Olympic discipline.

If you've not yet taken the plunge and tried EyeToy yet, then *Sports* is a perfectly serviceable place to start – once four of you are jostling for screen space, it can be quite a blast. With the sports theme automatically encouraging competition, and the faster pace, it feels a more well-rounded and inclusive party game. But if you own any of the previous *Play* titles, or you're flying solo, there's little to recommend this one unless you're in dire need of a gaming-based workout.



VERDICT 6/10

ONE FOR SALAD-DODGERS AND EYETOY NEWCOMERS





Rather strangely, *Power Stone 2* features Game Sharing, but *Power Stone 1* doesn't.

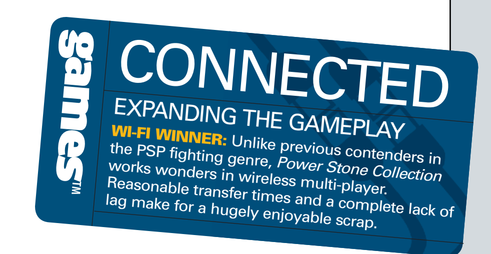


With one analogue stick and four face buttons, PSP is ideally suited to DC conversions.

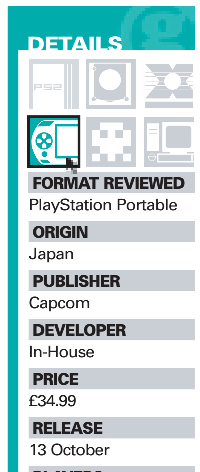


Despite being 3D, *Power Stone* retains the stylised art of Capcom's 2D library.

POWER STONE COLLECTION



YET ANOTHER FINE RETRO COLLECTION FROM CAPCOM



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
13 October

PLAYERS
1-4

Although its existence went mostly unnoticed outside of the elite Dreamcast owners' club, Capcom's original *Power Stone* is significant for being one of the first 3D games to deliver on the promise that polygons and the Z-axis made so many years previously. Those who did manage to sample the delights of this under-appreciated gem in 1999 found a game that used Dreamcast's power not for flashy cut-scenes and incidental imagery, but to actually make the game experience richer and more involving. The fact that the open arenas could be clambered upon, smashed through or even uprooted (in the case of the lampposts) by the stronger characters meant that *Power Stone* truly delivered a new kind of beat-'em-up that just hadn't been possible on previous hardware. Sadly, the franchise died along with Dreamcast with no sign of a sequel or port on the horizon and it wouldn't resurface until handheld consoles had reached a plateau from which fully interactive 3D was possible.

Capcom has made remarkable work of porting the Dreamcast classics to PSP. Initial fears that the widescreen format would ruin the game for purists are put to rest within seconds of starting a match, as old hands quickly re-familiarise themselves with an old friend. What matters is that the frame rate remains high and the controls responsive, allowing for *Power Stone*'s short-burst battles to play out as naturally as on their original platform. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the bundled sequel. Although the port is of the same technically high standard as the original, the game is handicapped by the portable screen, taking its four-player mode from occasionally confusing – on Dreamcast – to frequently frustrating and inaccessible on the significantly smaller display. Two-player bouts rarely suffer from the problem however; with one friend this game is just as enjoyable as its predecessor and different enough to warrant its inclusion. The multi-layered levels with their dynamic set pieces are a world away from *Power Stone 1*'s smaller, more refined rooms, meaning that the sequel plays more like a party game than the more skill-demanding original.

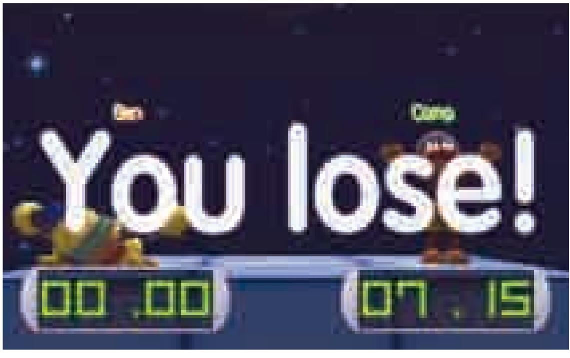
Anyone who's played *Power Stone* before will want to know two things: do the conversions hold up and does the Wi-Fi multi-player work well enough? The answer to both those questions is a definite yes; and for those fans this is essential. For those who've never played the game before, we ask one thing: please give *Power Stone* a chance. If you ignored it before then you were missing out on one of the most enjoyable beat-'em-ups the genre has

VERDICT 8/10
TWO CLASSICS GIVEN A DESERVED SECOND CHANCE





Island hopping in single-player. Monkeys are even funnier in drag.



It's a multi-player Kodak moment you'll want to replay in front of your loser friend again and again.



Otherwise known as the playground classic What's The Time, Mr Wolf? Bliss.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
THE MONKEY SHIELD: A way of preventing your tilt-screen opponent from seeing your cards.
MONKEY MINI-GAMES: Anthropomorphised monkeys play games for human entertainment. It's cruel but it's not real, so it's okay.

APE ACADEMY 2

"TAKE YOUR STINKING PAWS OFF ME, YOU DAMNED DIRTY APE"



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable
ORIGIN
Japan
PUBLISHER
Sony
DEVELOPER
In-House
PRICE
£29.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-2

Apes and monkeys make for engrossing documentaries. We'd stake our meagre monthly pittance on the fact that our simian cousins achieve bigger TV audiences than any other animal. By the same card, they also provide entertaining game content. Why else would Free Radical Design have included so many monkey challenges in its masterpiece that was *TimeSplitters 2*? Do you think it would have been quite as charming if they predominately used humans, snakes, woolly mammoths, or any other animal for that matter? Party games are usually an unerring hit among gamers, as long as you have a party to play them with. Therefore, we think party games with monkeys fail on a fundamental gaming level to be bad. Which is probably why *Ape Academy 2* is so much fun.

Ape theme aside, this party game works well because of its incredible simplicity and thus accessibility – as any party game should. Wading through a chunky manual of encyclopaedic proportions is not conducive to either multi-player or the current ADD generation. So *Ape Academy 2* circumvents this by using a card game with an established method of deciding who gets the con (rock paper scissors), and by briefing the player prior to each mini-game with a map of the controls on screen and a name that's highly indicative of the nature of the game.

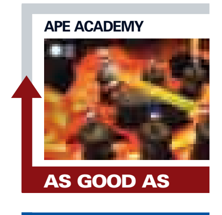
As for the main thrust of *Ape Academy 2*, the mini-games, we defy anyone not to love the itchy-trigger-finger intensity of Bamboo Sword Catcher, the tiptoe hesitation of Monkey Tag and the gleefully childish fun of Made You Look. Some of these basic controls repeat from one game to the next, like those that rely on split-second button depression, but there are so many mini-games with enough visual variance and comedic ape value that the odd repetition can be forgiven.

Single-player, however, has fleeting entertainment value. *Ape Academy 2* fits into the junk food category of games: instantly gratifying but not much good in the long run as stuffing your fat face with burgers is far more fun when you've someone to share the experience with. *Ape Academy 2* will endure many months more play time in multi-player mode, for while PSP AI can suffer no end of ribbing and remain deadpan, your highly strung best buddy is certain to crack after you've cajoled him about his fifth consecutive loss at Monkey Matrix. And as you're able to play in tilt-screen mode without the necessity for another PSP, only the friendless and dead have an excuse for not playing this game beyond its single-player lifetime.



VERDICT 7/10
PURE FUN, BUT SINGLE-PLAYER WILL TIRE QUICKLY

APE ACADEMY



AS GOOD AS

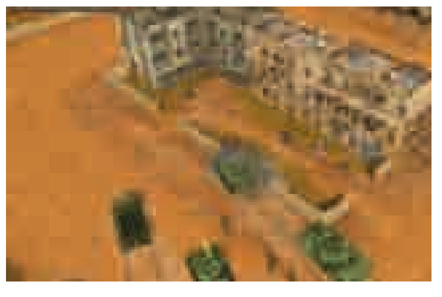
WORSE THAN



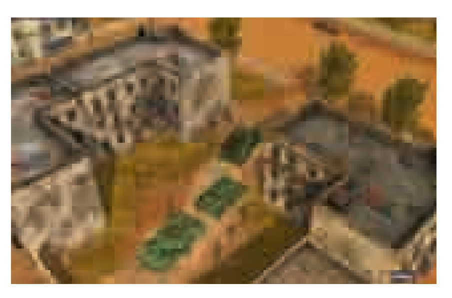
WARIOWARE



There are plenty of occupied buildings, so you'll need to tread carefully and search for the enemy to avoid an ambush.



Your troops will be pretty intelligent and can think for themselves, but they will also follow your every word if you so command.



All the objects, be they fences, buildings or trees, are 'real' and as such can be destroyed or knocked down.

JOINT TASK FORCE

BRINGING NEW LIFE TO THE RTS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Hungary

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

DEVELOPER
Mithis Entertainment

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-8

MINIMUM SPEC
Windows 2000/ XP, 1.5GHz processor, 512MB Ram, 64MB 3D graphics card, 2.5GB free hard disk space, DirectX 9.0c or higher



Try to remember the last time that you really had to come up with a strategy in an RTS game. Our guess is that the closest you've come in quite some time was amassing as many units as possible and then leading an all-out assault on the enemy. This takes planning, certainly, but making sure that your army is well supplied is common sense rather than genius. What's really so strategic about the RTS these days? Well, with *Joint Task Force,* Mithis is looking to bring tactics back to the strategy genre in an exciting and engaging way.

With veteran regime changer Major O'Connell at its head, you take command of the UN's new anti-terrorism and anti-insurgency unit the Joint Task Force. The JTF is sent into the middle of civil wars and other dire humanitarian situations with the aim of protecting innocent life. What's most striking about *JTF* is the immediacy of the events that take place. The UN Task Force involved and the plot are fictional, but crumbling dictatorships, impoverished nations and global terrorism are as real as ever. It gives what would otherwise be a solid and action-packed RTS added weight, in fact it's the same draw that has made games like *Battlefield 2* so popular.

Every map is full of intricate and imaginative detail, and crucially a great deal of it adds directly to the gameplay. Cracked dirt roads become trodden with tank tracks, washing hangs from lines between civilian buildings, and sand is blown in the wind limiting visibility. Desert wildernesses and urban sprawl alike have unique characteristics that can be used to gain the upper hand on your enemy. Take the high ground, for example, or have your men lie prone in long grass, and the enemy can't see them. Many of the buildings can be entered and fortified for those last ditch defences against insurmountable odds. Even civilian vehicles can be hot-wired and used for making roadblocks or simply for driving around inconspicuously to get Intel. And these vehicles all move in a realistic manner; tanks, for one, will charge through picket fences and perform three-point turns in order to change direction in small spaces. Careful planning can make all the difference between bloody firefights and scalpel-like, precision incursions; there are so many layers to every mission that you could perform each with an infinite number of variations each time.

Brilliantly, the enemy AI will use these tools too. Early missions will see you ambushed by militia hiding in a warehouse, or inconspicuously driving around in pick-up trucks. Throw in the superbly composed music and the tension can really ratchet up. You'll always feel vulnerable, no matter how many rangers, marksmen and commanders you have in your squad, and an

Q. GOOD AI?
Both ally and enemy AI is excellent. Troops carrying special weapons like bazookas will use them automatically without extra commands.

Q. DO I GET ANY CONTROL?
Of course, despite troops using their own initiative, they still follow your every command. Special skills can still be used on request.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THOSE BAD GUYS?
You'll be fighting against terrorists and rag-tag army units, and they behave accordingly. Trucks with mounted guns are a constant menace.

MOSCOW TO BERLIN: RED SIEGE



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



COMPANY OF HEROES

Reinforcements can be helicoptered anywhere in the vicinity of your commanding officer, but you'll certainly need some space.

Mithis has gone to great lengths to make the military vehicles look as true to life as possible.

inch-by-inch approach will serve you much better than bombing in headfirst. The mechanic of buying units as you progress rather than developing a base and a 'Build Tree' gives you no room for error and no place to retreat; embedded journalists will report successes, failures and indiscretions, and your UN funding will fluctuate accordingly. Your exploits will pop up in small, pre-rendered videos from CNCB News, which keep you updated on public opinion – yet more reason not to act all gung-ho. This is a game that promotes common sense, lateral thinking and cold, calculated strategy.

Outside forces will always be looking to upset the balance of play and give you more problems to deal with. Your priority, whatever the conditions, has to be keeping units alive, using them effectively and minimising collateral damage. These may not be your standard RTS objectives, but getting them right improves more than just your bank balance; units can be upgraded and levelled-up to the point of becoming ever-present 'heroes'. If one unit uses rocket-propelled grenades efficiently then they'll upgrade to carrying one permanently, although the first unit to upgrade will probably be your medic, as long as you can keep the poor bugger alive. Chasing down the optional side missions on each map will help make this progression much faster, but obviously involves added risks and greater condemnation for endangering life should you fail. It's a tightrope that once again gives *JTF* an extra layer of depth and makes repeated visits a joy.

Despite the contemporary setting, tales of terrorism and military coups will never become dated, and the gameplay is near faultless and incredibly addictive. Indeed, it's rare that a strategy game should possess so many levels of complexity and that they should all be so rewarding. *JTF* is hugely accessible and will be as easy to pick up for strategy newcomers as for veterans, while still remaining fiendishly difficult. Variety is *JTF*'s strength and it flows to every corner of the game. It's been an incredibly strong month for real-time strategy, and long may it continue.

games™

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

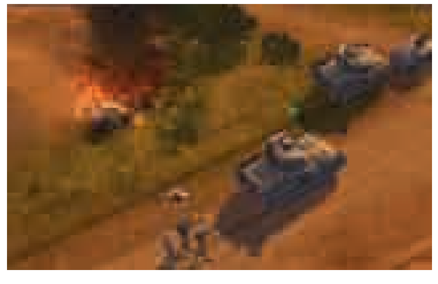
PARK LIFE: Build Trees have been thrown out of the window in favour of a more organic progression of resources. Restrain yourself from firing on civilians and recklessly destroying public property and your funds will increase.

VERDICT 8/10

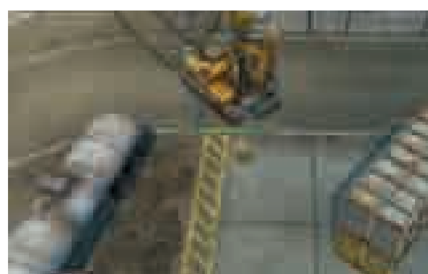
FRESH, FRONTLINE ACTION THAT REWRITES THE RTS

MODERN COMBAT

With strong design all around you'd be right to expect that the military vehicles look absolutely superb in *Joint Task Force*, but developer Mithis went the extra mile during the design process in the name of authenticity. Having determined that it wanted the most immediately identifiable and contemporary settings it could get, Mithis approached military contractors like Boeing and the Carlyle Group for the inside knowledge on what troops are using right now in Iraq, Afghanistan and other recently war-torn regions. This should give military enthusiasts a real buzz while simply adding another layer to the excellent atmosphere of the game for the rest of us.



Troops can be safe-housed in armoured vehicles and tanks, but it's good to keep some on foot for manoeuvrability.



Civilian vehicles like this Earth Mover are great for using as cover so steal it and hide your troops behind it.

MELT DOWN MERCURY AND YOU STILL GET MERCURY

MERCURY MELTDOWN



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation Portable

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Ignition

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

What makes a deserving sequel? Does the emulation of any creative endeavour, unique in concept or execution, necessarily cheapen both itself and the original? How much, and in what way should a sequel differ from its previous incarnations? What is the universal formula for the key number of sequels that is proportionate to the perceived value of the original after which the series becomes trite? If you can figure out those long-winded questions, then you probably won't sweat much over the answer. Otherwise, use this review as one big analogy and you'll probably arrive at the same conclusion as us.

Consider *Archer Maclean's Mercury*. A year on since Awesome Studios brought us the unique and inspired *Screwball Scramble*-like PSP puzzler, *Mercury* has spawned the sequel *Mercury Meltdown*. Significantly, Ignition's own team has developed it in-house since progenitor Maclean himself resigned as creative director of Awesome last year. And bereft of its creator's vision, it seems that *Meltdown* has become as derivative as *Mercury* was distinctive.

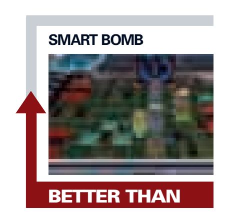
It's almost as if Ignition was struggling to distinguish the sequel from the original. *Meltdown* retains the original gameplay in its entirety, redesigning levels, bolting on some extra features and a reward system typical to any genre over the last decade. The new cel-shaded look is certainly attractive: it's a different image for a puzzle title, and there are only a handful games that have braved this relatively new graphical concept. But put *Meltdown* into the same context as the epic *Zelda: The Wind Waker* and the forthcoming *Okami*, which respectively offer epic and artistic content, and the idea that a relatively unoriginal game should don what has become a mantle of creativity is laughable.

Despite deriding *Meltdown* for its lack of originality, it's still a very decent game. While it may be exactly the same as *Mercury* at heart, there's enough extra content to make it interesting. Changes to the state and thus the properties of the blob add a vaguely new dimension and the Wi-Fi party games open it up to an entertaining multi-player mode – although with a maximum of two players you're not likely to keep the neighbours up.

Meltdown deserves a knock for being a shamelessly derivative cash cow, but the novelty hasn't faded. If you thought that the original took itself too seriously – or, better still, if you have never played it – *Mercury Meltdown* is a more than viable alternative.

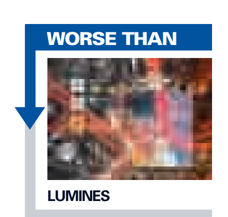
VERDICT 7/10
BIG GAME, BIG FUN, BIG CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK

SMART BOMB

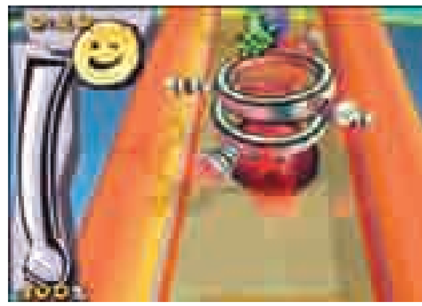


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



LUMINES



Bling your blob in a rainbow of colours in order to access all areas.



Encourage children to play with a toxic element in the 'playground'.



It may well be *Mercury* all over again, but there's certainly enough extra features here to warrant a purchase.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
STATE OF PLAY: Your blob can be cooled, heated and solidified to give it different attributes.
CEL-SHADING: *Mercury* has dressed up to fool us into thinking it's a completely different game.

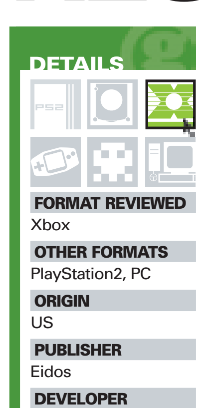
NOT QUITE THE DOG'S DANGLERS

RESERVOIR DOGS

games™ MISSING LINK

WHAT'S MISSING FROM THIS TITLE

ONE NOTE: Taking hostages is fun, going through the same ritual again and again and again is not. What *Reservoir Dogs* really needs is more variety to make it feel exciting.



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Eidos

DEVELOPER
Volatile Games

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

Film licences are often compromised by the rush to meet the subject matter's cinematic release date. Not so in this case, where Volatile Games was afforded the luxury of a 14-year cushion between the original release of *Reservoir Dogs* the movie to come up with some fresh ideas for *Reservoir Dogs* the game. Unfortunately, rather than turning this time gap to its advantage, Volatile Games will simply have to look for another excuse as to why this latest film licence has failed.

The emphasis of *Reservoir Dogs* is man-handling the police with hostages and threats rather than out-and-out shooting. It's an interesting way of elevating the gameplay above the usual third-person shooter doldrums and initially, it looks like a successful one too. Rather than going in guns blazing, each situation has to be assessed as you work out a plan to counter each threat in the room before you. While you never feel as though you're against the odds, those using brawn rather than brains will bump into the crimson red Game Over screen enough times to convince them to change their ways.

The key word, however, is 'initially'. Before long, you recognise patterns and each hostage situation feels too black and white, too transparent. They broadly play out the same way every time: neutralise civilian, use civilian to neutralise the cops, grab neutralised cop for next hostage situation. It's little more than a game of rock paper scissors and lacks the ambiguity that would make a hostage situation thrilling and unpredictable. It's too easy to get comfortable in the routines *Reservoir Dogs* offers and as such it feels like going through the motions. All later levels can offer is a higher number of cops and less hostages, but the routine is still the same. It doesn't help that the AI is of the pedestrian stand-on-the-spot-and-return-fire variety.

As if second-guessing this problem, Volatile Games tries to break the formula with mixed results. Using civilians to open doors and break safes works, but the driving sections definitely do not. So, it's a shame that there's not enough of the former and far too much of the latter – a horrible hybrid of *Driver* and *Burnout* that manages to tread on both titles' toes while failing to capture what made them great. This brings you right back to square one – an interesting idea that succumbs to repetition and never really recovers. *Reservoir Dogs* is proof that the luxury of time isn't enough to save a film licence. It still needs solid execution and, fatally, this is the one thing *Reservoir Dogs* the game lacks.

VERDICT 5/10
BRAVE IDEAS, EMPLOYED LAZILY

ADVENT RISING



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



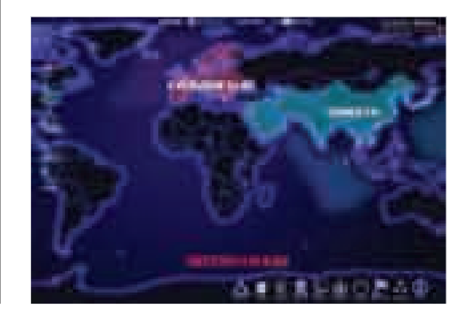
MAX PAYNE

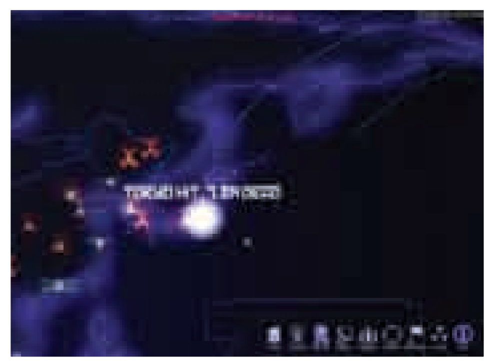


The taking hostages idea is unique, but the lacklustre execution means that the drama falls flat.



Oh, driving sections, why do you insist on ruining action games? Same goes for you, stealth sections.







Nuke time, and a third of Tokyo is wiped out in one fell swoop. Rarely have so many deaths been celebrated so much.

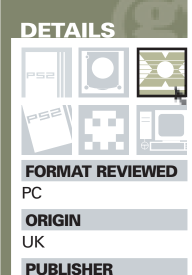
Positioning your radars is important; maximum coverage is paramount to protecting your territory efficiently.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
TAKE SIDES: Six players can make or break alliances – Diplomacy mode starts you on the same side.
SACK RACE: The addictive real-time Office mode may be responsible for more job losses than Thatcher.

DEFCON

NUCLEAR WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Introversion Software

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£10 (Introversion download)
$14.95 (Steam)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-6

D*efcon's* title screen opens with a wire-frame globe spinning slowly, while text appears detailing such sobering statistics as 'radiation effects on human physiology' or 'symptoms and signs of radiation sickness'. It's quite a contrast from the gleeful cries of triumphant players after an intense online battle, where the horror of global thermonuclear war is reduced to a spectacularly amoral competition. It's kill AND be killed; a game that's not about who wins, but who loses least. Or fewest, if we're talking body counts.

Created by self-styled 'last of the bedroom programmers' Introversion, *Defcon* wears its developer's influences with pride – its *War Games*-meets-*24* visual and aural cues are no accident. Ostensibly an RTS that also resembles survival-horror in the truest sense, *Defcon* is as much about self-preservation as it is decimating your enemy. Like all the best strategy games, defence is just as important – if not more so – than attack.

So, early stages of a *Defcon* game are all about tense, nervy, stealthy preparation – readying radar dishes, silos and airbases, while positioning naval units for potential attacks, and then using your aircraft for reconnaissance to reveal enemy installations. Until the countdown to Defcon 1 reaches zero and you're finally able to launch your nukes that is, and you're then able to see how well or poorly organised you are.

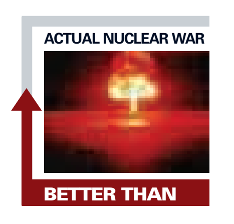
This might all sound a little simple – basic, even – to strategy enthusiasts, and to a degree they'd be right. But really *Defcon* is as simple or as complex as the game's players make it. A quick game of Speed Defcon against a single opponent, with genocide scoring on (only points per kill count), is obviously going to be far simpler yet no less enjoyable than a drawn-out war at real-time pace with two territories per player and alliances being formed and broken all over the place.

It's this latter stroke of genius that seals *Defcon's* place among the pantheon of PC strategy classics, with the bargain-basement price cementing its must-buy status (and the score at the bottom of this review). Forging a bond with an opponent before sneakily positioning subs within range of their major cities is worryingly enjoyable – it's a dubious pleasure to see the legend "Tokyo – 7.3m dead" coldly displayed on screen. In fact, the terrifying final analysis at the Game Over screen is only topped by the very real fear that the leader of the free world is looking at a map very similar to *Defcon's*, pointing somewhere around the Middle East and muttering 'eeny meeny miney mo'.



VERDICT 9/10
INTROVERSION'S BEST YET – CHILLINGLY BRILLIANT

ACTUAL NUCLEAR WAR



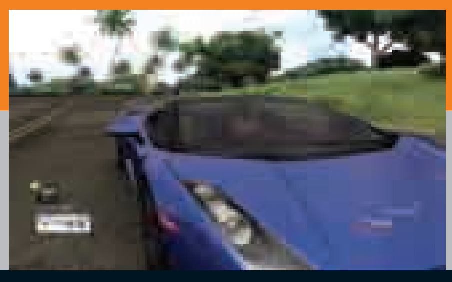
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



WORLD PEACE


eMag

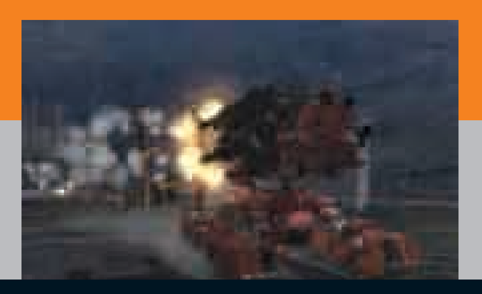


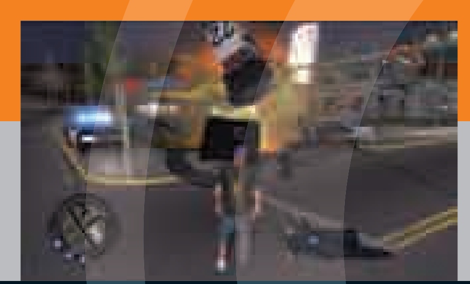
ONLINE ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

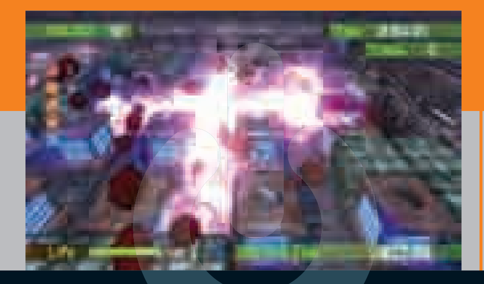
TRIED & TESTED

After a barren summer with the release of only a few Xbox 360 games – and even fewer with online facilities – a September flurry of titles provides enough content for another 'Tried & Tested' look at the best that Xbox Live gaming has to offer. This issue we devote a full page to the online mammoth that is *Test Drive Unlimited*, plus we take a varied online look at gansta-bashing in *GTA*-imitator *Saints Row*, a mecha-machine test of *Chromehounds* and more. Will the online aspect of these titles be enough to warrant the hefty next-gen price tag? Read on to find out...

Xbox360 LIVE TEST







EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…

TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED

THE NEED FOR SPEED, REDEFINED

With the single-player aspect of *Test Drive Unlimited* receiving a great deal of scrutiny last issue, this month we take to the servers to survey the bigger picture. How does this bold attempt from Atari hold up against the demands of thousands of online racers?

There are multiple ways to enjoy the online community within *Unlimited*. Merely drive anywhere on the island and flash your headlights at another human driver and you'll initiate an instant challenge. This Quick Race option allows your opponent (should they accept your challenge) to select the desired route, anywhere up to a maximum of 3.8 miles away and no less than one mile from the starting point. A victory later and you or your opponent or opponents can choose a Revenge rematch, with you or another combatant selecting the route.

If there are a group of you then select any one of the 30-plus multi-player icons highlighted in orange on the map. From here, the customary public or private lobby system kicks in allowing you to select any car or motorbike that you own, and at the end of each race choose any one of the numerous fixed multi-player tracks throughout the island around which to race.





Now, while many racing games may come to a grinding halt at this point, *Test Drive Unlimited* moves it up a gear with various custom challenge locations dotted around the map under the guise of diners. Here you can take on any of the challenges set by other gamers in an effort to win money – you pay a fee directly to the player who set the contest – or, alternatively, you can set up your own challenge with your own money on the line.

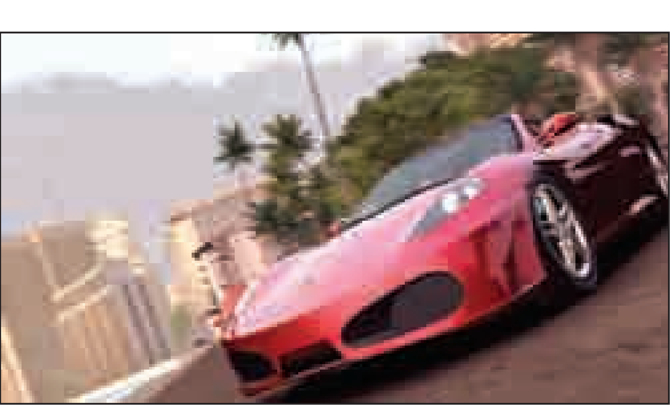
Impressed? You should be, but there's one vital and enticing online element that we haven't mentioned yet, and that's the never-ending fun that can be had by simply racing around the island, á là *Gumball Rally*. Whether you're undertaking a coastal circuit of the island or twisting and sliding around the inner central roads of the mountains, there is no limit to the fun to be had online. The only slight niggle is that it can, on occasion, take a few attempts to 'lock on' and find your friend. The reason for this is that there are multiple servers (1,000 gamers per server) running at max capacity during peak hours, so it takes a little persistence to meet up on the same stretch of road, however, plans are afoot at Eden to fix this.

Offering additional weight to the online component is the ability to trade cars and bikes on a central online marketplace (not functional at the time of review due to an unforeseen bug), thus potentially saving you money on buying a second-hand car as opposed to paying over the odds for pristine showroom condition.

The presence of clubs around the island offers a clan option to proceedings, whereby joining a club allows you to lounge by the pool and chit-chat about your day or that corner that you nailed sublimely. Alternatively, it gives you the chance to challenge your fellow members or even a completely different club.

While many of the single-player frustrations we highlighted last issue will always remain, the power of the online experience in *TDU* is more than enough to offset any irritation you might suffer behind the wheel, and it's testament to Eden's execution that this is the case. And all this without lag…

9/10
AN ONLINE EXPERIENCE TO BE SAVOURED





Xbox360 LIVE TEST

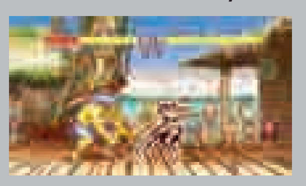
ONLINE ALL THE TIME – THAT'S THE XBOX 360 WAY. BUT THEN, ARE THE GAMES YOU CAN PLAY WORTH THE

Arcade Perfect

THE LATEST OFFERING FROM XBOX LIVE ARCADE

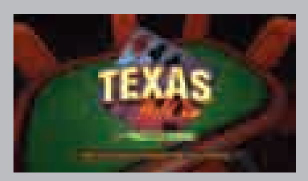
STREET FIGHTER II: HYPER FIGHTING

Finally it's here, and it's great. Some connectivity issues aside, *SFII* online is magnificent fun, and a great showcase for the potential of Live Arcade. Just don't use E Honda – filthy cheat.



TEXAS HOLD 'EM

A free download for its first 48 hours, *Texas Hold 'Em* is extraordinarily addictive, somehow making you care about fictional money. It's all about the bluff, and outfoxing real Xbox Live people is satisfaction guaranteed.



TIME PILOT

We're still waiting. We all wanted *Lumines Live*, and what do we get? *Time Pilot*, an ancient shooter from Konami. It's a lot of fun, but a little TOO retro for our liking; we'd prefer to see the Arcade used for retro evolved rather than retro nostalgia.





SAINTS ROW

FRAGGING AND LAGGING

Saints Row's multi-player is incredibly tough to score. As it stands, for UK players it's laggy to the point of being entirely unplayable. Characters jump across the screen quicker than *Mortal Kombat's* Raiden, you can drop dead for no reason and the less said about vehicular combat the better. However, the potential for a superb online experience is here. On the odd occasion we found lagless games, match types such as Protect Tha Pimp (one team of hit men versus one team of escorts protecting, yes, a pimp) and Big Ass Chains are eminently playable. The third-person combat controls evoke memories of *Halo*, and despite the overly macho bravado on show, the tongue-in-cheek gangsta chic is actually quite endearing, especially as each player can create an online avatar using the game's excellent customisation system. So, brimming with potential but currently unplayable. Volition is hard at work on a patch, and if and when it comes, *Saints Row's* multi-player will be a solid 8. Until then, though…

5/10

HOPEFULLY A PATCH WILL UNLEASH ITS FULL POTENTIAL





PREY

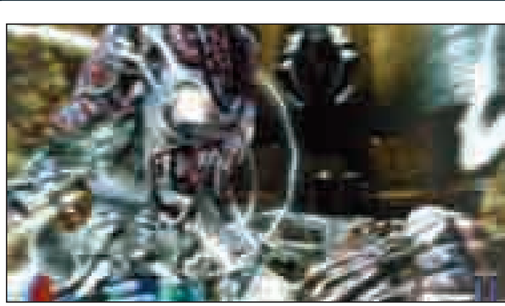
IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

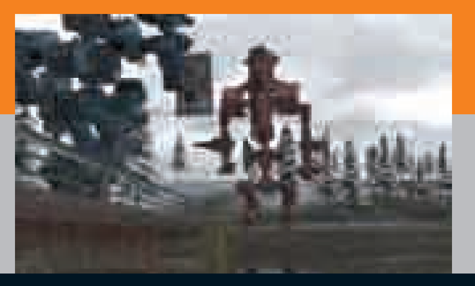
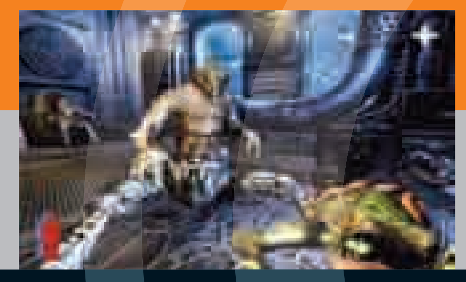
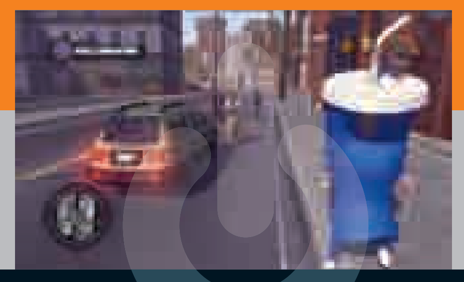
Featuring the same abstract level design that warmed us to the single-player, *Prey's* online deathmatch is a pleasant diversion from the likes of *Halo 2* and *Perfect Dark*. It's reminiscent of *Quake 4* – tight arenas, powerful weapons and only four players on each map, but the unusual nature of the level design allows for some left-field tactics such as 'portal camping' and rigging doors with limpet mines, á là *GoldenEye*.

Now, it's far from perfect – the online community is particularly small and it can be extremely difficult to even find a suitable game, plus with only four players, matches lack the scope of the likes of, say, *Call Of Duty* or, yes, *Halo 2*, but nevertheless *Prey's* multi-player is really rather a lot of fun. Great weaponry, very decent levels and a solid engine make for some genuinely entertaining blasting. Not the deathmatch's second coming then, but a pleasantly diverting aside all the same.

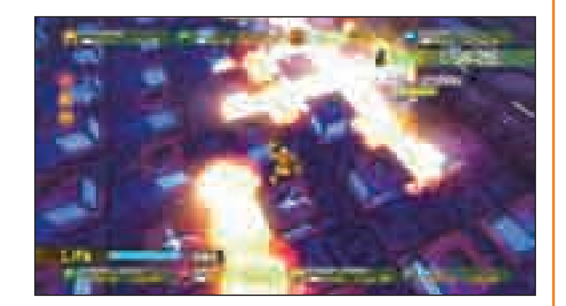
7/10

FILLS THE GAP UNTIL THE NEXT BIG SHOOTER ARRIVES



EFFORT? WE'VE SPENT PLENTY OF TIME WITH EACH OF THEM SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO WASTE THAT CASH…



BOMBERMAN ACT:ZERO

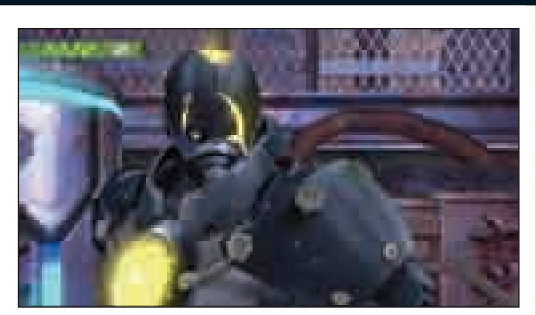
THE GAME'S SOLE SAVING GRACE

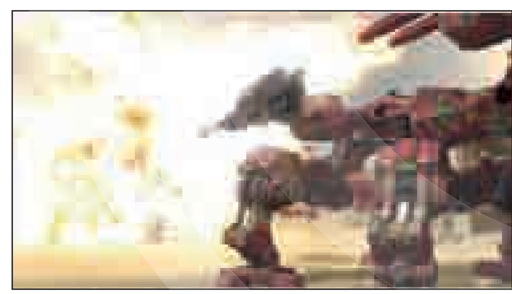
As last month's review testified, *Bomberman Act: Zero* is downright awful. A miserable, emo-themed bastardisation of *Bomberman*, with no offline multi-player (God have mercy on whoever made that decision), dreadful single-player and not a single ounce of soul. Thank the Lord then, that the Xbox Live multi-player is still pretty enjoyable.

It's almost impossible not to enjoy *Bomberman*. Even with life bars, horrible visuals and about as much joy as a Thom Yorke solo project, *Bomberman Act: Zero* is still a thoroughly enjoyable game on Live. No lag, good banter and frenetic competition always lead to a good Live experience, and this is no different. It's hardly going to trouble *Project Gotham 3* or *Burnout Revenge* at the top of 360's Live league table, but it's a harmless, slightly guilty pleasure. In a dream world, *Super Bomberman* would be released on Live Arcade for everyone to enjoy. Until then, we'll have to make do with Konami's effort.

7/10

ALMOST BANISHES THE MEMORY OF THE SINGLE-PLAYER





CHROMEHOUNDS

EXPANDING THE MECH UNIVERSE

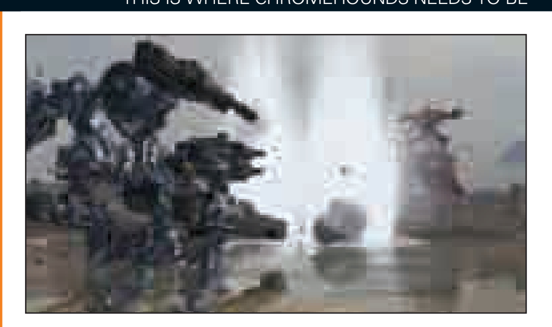
Now, this is how online gaming should be. A persistent Live war that players can drop in and out of at any time. It's epic, dramatic and positively fantastic, and proof that the game's lacklustre single-player campaign is nothing more than an elongated training session for the real deal – The Neroimus War.

Essentially a territorial battle between three warring factions, The Neroimus War pitches players against both AI and player-controlled mechs, meaning that even when a server is empty, you can jump in and help out the war effort for your side. The war continues until one side claims all of the territory, or two months elapses whereby the servers reset and the original conditions of war are maintained. This is the type of ambitious project that online gaming has promised for years, but rarely delivers. The slow-paced gameplay and cumbersome aiming are still an acquired taste, but Xbox Live is *Chromehounds*' spiritual home. Great stuff.




8/10

THIS IS WHERE CHROMEHOUNDS NEEDS TO BE

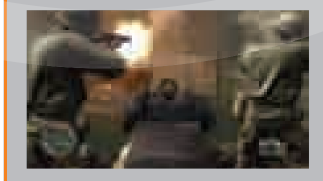


Looking Forward

THE NEXT BIG XBOX LIVE HAPPENINGS…

CALL OF DUTY 3

We've spent some quality time in the company of Treyarch's latest and it's looking very good indeed. A whole team was dedicated to multi-player this time, so expectations are high.



GEARS OF WAR

As you can no doubt tell from our feature on page 34, our first look at *Gears* had us more excited than we thought possible. Single-player looks superb, but multi-player is destined for greatness. This can't come soon enough.



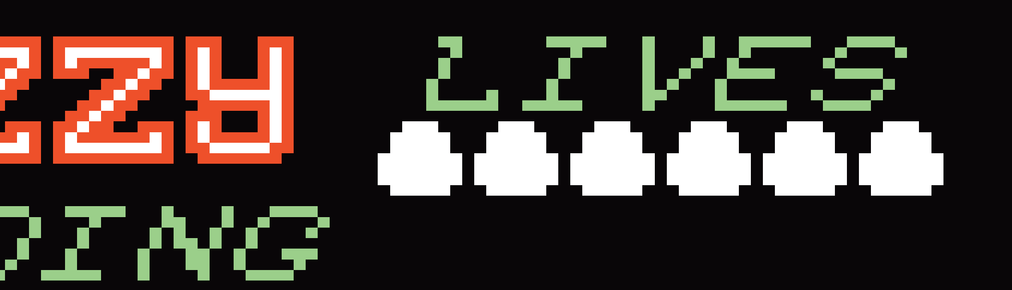
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6

Details of the definitive football franchise's Online mode are sketchy, but in the current climate Konami simply must improve on the token service offered by previous games in the series.



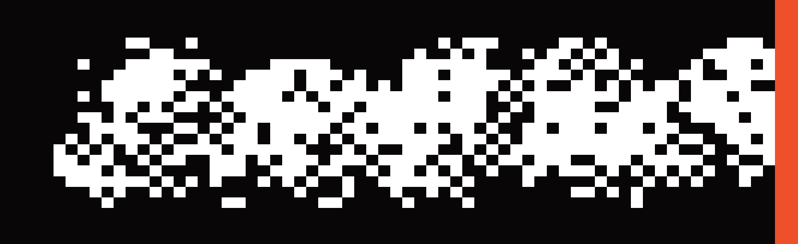


How do you like your eggs? **Dizzy, Amstrad CPC [Codemasters] 1987**


LIVES










eMag



RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
AN IMAGINE PUBLICATION
NO.49 OCTOBER 2006
00p
GREATEST GAME EVER
Jeff Minter's hypnotic Tempest 2000
PLUS
RETRO NEWS, REVIEWS,
CLASH OF THE TITANS,
THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION,
WORST LICENCE EVER
AND MORE…
FINAL FANTASY
A COLLECTORS' GUIDE TO THE ULTIMATE RPG
GUN CONTROL
The best PSOne lightgun games
BUYERS' GUIDE
RETRO GEAR
Your complete guide to the classic consoles and illustrious software

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

It's certainly a great time to be a retro gamer. The number of retro game remakes, re-releases and compilations that are released every year is steadily growing to a torrent, but I have to say that I'm growing tired of seeing the same old games over and over.

As good as they are, do we really need to see *Pac-Man*, *Street Fighter II* and *Space Invaders* as often as we do? Have a look at some of the great arcade websites on the net, like Klov and System-16, and you'll find hundreds of brilliant coin-op games that still haven't been ported to any console.

What about Namco's *Outfoxies*, Irem's *R-Type Leo*, Nintendo's *Arm Wrestling* or even SNK's *Ozma Wars*? If games like these were added to the re-releases and compilations that the big publishers continually pump out then there'd be something more interesting for us hardened retro fans to play, and a more enlightening selection for the casual players.

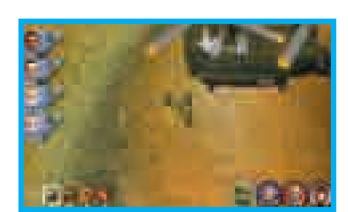
Don't get me wrong, the likes of Capcom and Taito have put out some very comprehensive collections of late, but it would be even better if everyone else would follow their lead. The world would definitely be a better place if they did.

Ashley Day
ashley.day@imagine-publishing.co.uk

WAR HAS NEVER BEEN SO MUCH FUN… EXCEPT THE FIRST TIME AROUND

CANNON FODDER HITS PSP

Anyone who doesn't remember the original *Cannon Fodder* is either too young to read this magazine or has never actually picked up a joypad. The classic real-time strategy game enchanted everyone who played it on the Amiga back in 1993 before the game exploded onto every format known to man. Now, the timeless cartoon war sim is making its way to PSP with a visual makeover and brand new levels to take advantage of the advanced hardware. Although the game will be viewed from an overhead perspective, to retain the original gameplay, the PSP's graphical abilities will be used to implement an in-game TV channel that occasionally pops up to give a close-up view of the miniature soldiers in action.



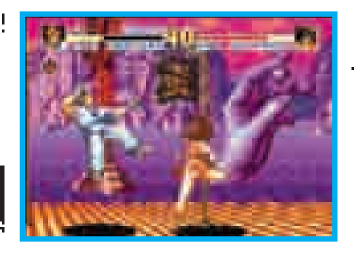
Aside from the improved visuals, Codemasters promises that new gameplay features like air strikes, radar sweeps, four-player deathmatch and co-operative modes, and an arsenal of new weaponry will all make an appearance. We wouldn't be surprised if the original 2D game is an unlockable extra as well to be honest. Our only concern is how well Codemasters can adapt the original game's mouse controls to PSP's pad and stick. Only *Cannon Fodder*'s spring 2007 release date will reveal all.



A FATAL ATTRACTION?

FATAL FURY MEETS XBOX LIVE ARCADE

If *Street Fighter II*'s release on Xbox Live Arcade wasn't enough to make 2D fighting fans happy then the announcement that SNK will bring *Fatal Fury Special* to the service should definitely do the trick. The 1993 Neo Geo game isn't quite the best of the *Fatal Fury* series – we'd go for *Real Bout 2* or *Mark Of The Wolves* – but it is still a top-drawer beat-'em-up that's sure to pull in the points when it's eventually released.



Fatal Fury Special is one of a number of retro-themed releases that SNK is planning including the *Metal Slug* re-releases on PSP, GBA and Wii, and *King Of Fighters Ultimate Match* and *Fatal Fury Battle Archives Vol 2* both on PS2.

If *Fatal Fury Special* can play as well as *Street Fighter II* over a broadband connection then it's sure to be yet another must-have Live Arcade game and another weapon in Microsoft's battle against the competing online services of Sony and Nintendo.



Retro DIARY

Old-school gaming is on the up, so games™ dedicates itself to keeping you up to date with what's going down in the world of retro

OCTOBER '06

Taito Legends Power-Up

Date: 06 October **Publisher:** Xplosiv **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PSP

It's reviewed in this issue and is out the day after this very magazine hits the shelves. While it's missing many of our favourite Taito classics, *Taito Legends Power-Up* has to be admired for the large quantity of games available on the disc. And all you have to do is turn the page to read our full critique.

Capcom Puzzle World

Date: 06 October **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £19.99 **Format:** PSP

Capcom's second PSP retro compilation is entirely themed around old-school puzzle games, and features *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo*, *Block Block* as well as all three of the *Buster Brothers* games. While *Puzzle Fighter* is sure to steal all the attention, it's *Buster Brothers* (better known as *Pang*) that we're most excited about. The bubble-bursting arcade game is a great little title that's perfectly suited to PSP's wide screen.

Power Stone Collection

Date: 13 October **Publisher:** Capcom **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

Oh Capcom. With these retro collections you are really spoiling us. The original *Power Stone* was a must-have Dreamcast title and one of the most underrated three-dimensional fighters of all time, so we're ecstatic to see it get a second chance – along with the sequel – on PlayStation Portable. If Capcom can get the Wi-Fi multi-player working fast enough then this will be yet another essential re-release for the PSP.

Metal Slug Anthology

Date: 27 October **Publisher:** Ignition **Price:** £34.99 **Format:** PSP

SNK's fans have been waiting very patiently for a collection like this to come along and they're soon about to be rewarded in a big way. We've played early code and are confident that *Metal Slug Anthology*, previewed on page 74, will turn out to be one of the essential retro collections of the year.

Bespoke Apex Arcade Cabinet

Date: Available now **Publisher:** Bespoke Arcades **Price:** Around £2,000

Bespoke Arcades' latest model of custom-built arcade cabinet should be available by the time you read this. The stand-up Apex Cabinet follows the firm's popular Synergy Cocktail Cabinet (apparently owned by such 'retro-gaming aficionados' as Thierry Henry and Wayne Rooney), and is the first PC-powered arcade cabinet to be manufactured and released in the UK. Each cab features a 19-inch monitor, makes use of the same arcade parts as some Sega coin-ops and comes complete with 140 officially licensed games including arcade hits from Taito, Capcom, Midway and Atari, of which around 60 are actually Atari 2600 games. All cabinets can be bought from Selfridges nationwide, as well as Hamleys, London. Visit www.bespoke-arcades.co.uk for more information.

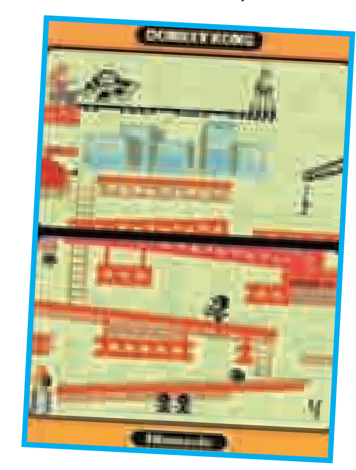
LIFE IS SO UNFAIR

JAPAN GETS EXCLUSIVE GAME & WATCH COLLECTION

Nintendo fans who regularly keep an eye on Japan's Club Nintendo service will know that our friends in the Far East get more free Nintendo goodies in one month than Nintendo Europe's Stars Catalogue give away in a year. What's more, the freebies are often exclusive collectables that never even make it to shop shelves.

The latest Club Nintendo item to get fans weeping is the *Game & Watch Collection*: a special DS game that recreates three Multi-screen Game & Watch games on DS's dual screens. The two formats are a perfect match, and to be honest we're shocked that Nintendo didn't do this sooner.

The featured games, *Oil Panic*, *Donkey Kong* and *Green House* are all from Nintendo's first batch of Multi-screen Game & Watch releases in 1982. Speculation is rife that this limited-edition release is a prelude to a much bigger commercial release including all of the multi-screen games, but for now this is the only way to play the ancient handheld games on DS. Buy it at an online auction house near you.

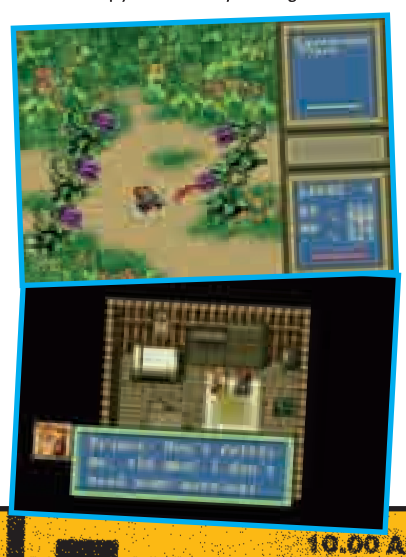


NEW MEGA DRIVE GAME FOR SALE

LIMITED BEGGAR PRINCE CARTS STILL AVAILABLE

Mega Drive collectors with a taste for quality RPGs may be familiar with *Beggar Prince*, a brand new, independently produced Mega Drive game that's the first to be made available on an actual cartridge in nearly a decade. The game, which recently scored 80 per cent in our sister mag, *Retro Gamer*, works on any Mega Drive or Genesis system and comes complete with a professional quality instruction book and authentic packaging.

The game was released in late May this year and is strictly limited edition, but the producer – Super Fighter Team – still has a handful of copies left. Now would be the perfect time, for those who don't already have it, to order the cart before it completely disappears and becomes a favourite of the overpriced auction brigade. Check out our exclusive screenshots then log on to www.beggarprince.com to order a copy before they're all gone.





FOR RETRO MEMORIES POWER UP YOUR PSP

Format: PlayStation Portable
Publisher: Xplosiv **Developer:** Taito
Release: 6 October **Price:** £19.99

After two of the greatest ever retro compilations we were expecting big things from the PSP edition. Boy were we disappointed. The main problem is many of Taito's best games are absent – perhaps held back for a sequel. Still, there's no knocking the likes of *The New Zealand Story* or *Elevator Action* – the only titles worth getting really excited about. The original *Taito Legends* featured brilliant gems like *Bubble Bobble*, *Rainbow Islands* and *Zoo Keeper*, but none of those games feature here even though *Rainbow Islands Extra* was on the Japanese release, *Taito Memories Pocket*. Their absence is sorely felt as *Taito Legends Power-Up* feels quite empty without them.

Power-Up does feature a few titles that don't appear on previous compilations. *Space Chaser*'s a *Pac-Man* clone that fails to capture the magic of the Namco classic but is worth a look from an historical perspective. *Space Dungeon*, on the other hand, is much more enjoyable; it's a *Robotron* clone with non-linear explorable levels that reminds us of a primitive *Smash TV*. What's amazing about *Space Dungeon* is that it came out a year before *Robotron*. The opportunity to learn about such historical anomalies is the massive benefit of collections like this and we applaud Taito and Xplosiv for including the game even though it isn't an obvious crowd pleaser.



Legend Of Kage **benefits from its cosmetic upgrade.**



Elevator Action**'s cool but we we'd prefer the sequel.**

In addition to the classic games, *Power-Up* also features four deluxe remakes that bring the graphics up to date, reformat the picture to a widescreen ratio and improve the sound while leaving the original gameplay intact. This is the way we like to see classic games updated and it works beautifully here. *The Legend Of Kage 2005*, an exaggerated ninja run-and-gun game, is an especially worthy addition to the collection, which almost makes up for the lack of *Rainbow Islands*.

In terms of accuracy, the emulation of the games is exemplary. Each title looks, plays and sounds just as we remember and can be adjusted for vertical or horizontal play on PSP's screen to retain the original arcade ratio. There's also an option to stretch the games for a full-screen, horizontal display, but we wouldn't recommend this as it can ruin the experience of some games. Finally, there's a Game Sharing mode that allows another PSP to freely receive any classic game, which then stays



on the machine till it is switched off.

The exclusive games and PSP-tailored options are welcome, but they can't make up for the fact that the compilation as a whole is lacking some of Taito's best games. Those interested in playing the more obscure titles from Taito's back catalogue, like *Crazy Balloon* and *Kuri Kinton*, will probably get a lot from *Power-Up*, but the majority of players interested in the more accessible games like *Bubble Bobble* and *Darius* should avoid *Taito Legends Power-Up* until a sequel emerges.

THE FULL LIST

ORIGINAL GAMES

Space Invaders 1978
Space Invaders Part II 1979
Space Chaser 1979
Balloon Bomber 1980
Crazy Balloon 1980
Lunar Rescue 1980
Phoenix 1980
Qix 1981
Space Dungeon 1981
Alpine Ski 1982
Chack'n Pop 1983
Elevator Action 1983
The Fairyland Story 1985
The Legend Of Kage 1985
Return Of The Invaders 1985
Ki Ki Kai Kai 1986
Rastan Saga 1987
Kuri Kinton 1988
The New Zealand Story 1988
Raimais 1988
Cameltry 1989

DELUXE GAMES

Crazy Balloon 2005
Balloon Bomber 2005
The Legend Of Kage 2005
Cameltry 2005

OVERALL SCORE 75%

CLASH OF THE TITANS

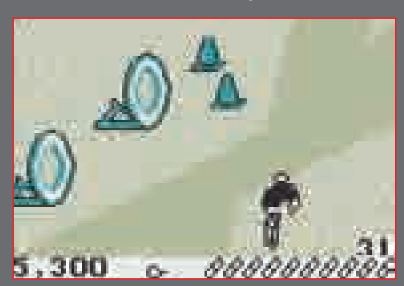
PAPERBOY

In a change to the usual format of Clash of the Titans we've decided to temporarily ditch the 8-bit micros in favour of the first wave of handheld game consoles. Sega's Game Gear, the Atari Lynx and Nintendo's unfeasibly popular Game Boy all housed some fantastic games back in the early Nineties, but which was the king of the handhelds? This month we answer that question with a look at the conversion of Atari's brilliant arcade game *Paperboy*.

AND THE WINNER IS...

GAME BOY

Although the Game Gear version was the overall winner in more categories there's no denying that a game lives or dies by its playability. As such, the Game Boy is this month's winner simply because it plays very well and, despite its technological disadvantages, has visuals that don't detract from the overall experience.



Keep it simple and concentrate on gameplay, that's how you win.



The Game Gear port looks fantastic but plays like a dog. Shame.



ROUND 1: VISUALS

GAME GEAR: Visually speaking, the Game Gear version of *Paperboy* is leagues ahead of the Game Boy and Lynx adaptations. The colours are bold and vibrant and there's much more animation than in the other versions – even down to the way that Paperboy's coat flaps in the wind. About as close to the arcade version as you'll get on a handheld.

GAME BOY: Game Boy is definitely the ZX Spectrum of the handheld world: underpowered and unattractive although developers still found a way to make games look good. *Paperboy* is no exception; it's nothing like the arcade version but is nice and clean with easily identifiable sprites and a solid frame rate with little flicker.

LYNX: Considering that this is an Atari game running on an Atari handheld, it's amazing that the world's oldest developer managed to cock the game up so badly. Blocky and indistinct, *Paperboy* on the Lynx is a horrible mess that instantly repels anyone who picks it up.

WINNER: GAME GEAR
RUNNER UP: GAME BOY

ROUND 2: AUDIO

GAME GEAR: Replicating *Paperboy's* digitised speech on a handheld would always be tough, so it's unsurprising to hear that none of the portables even attempted it. It's disappointing, however, that none of them feature the original theme tune either. The Game Gear music is quite good: it has plenty of changes and isn't as repetitive as the others.

GAME BOY: Don't even bother turning up the volume on the Game Boy if you're thinking of playing *Paperboy*, because the music is an abomination. The short series of beeps and whistles becomes very irritating, incredibly quickly. The music is nothing like the arcade soundtrack and doesn't even come close to the passable Game Gear tune.

LYNX: By using the same theme tune as the Game Boy version, Lynx *Paperboy* automatically finds its way onto the 'listen to a CD instead' list. Although there is a little more range and depth to the tune, it is still pretty annoying and adds another black mark to what is a pretty disappointing conversion.

WINNER: GAME GEAR
RUNNER UP: LYNX

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

GAME GEAR: The gameplay is where everything falls apart for this otherwise excellent Game Gear game. Although the handling is very good and all the obstacles appear where they should, the entire game is let down by Atari's inexplicable decision to make Paperboy throw the papers at an odd angle that makes it far too difficult to hit the post boxes.

GAME BOY: Despite its functional graphics and sub-par sound, the Game Boy version of *Paperboy* actually plays very well. The difficulty isn't selectable and the placement of enemies isn't arcade perfect, but as a handheld game to be enjoyed in its own right, this one wins out because of its responsive controls, decent speed and polished playability.

LYNX: The Lynx version may be the ugliest, but we have to admit that it plays rather well. The difficulty is selectable, just like the coin-op, it runs slightly faster than the Game Boy version and even keeps track of both the score and damage bonus. Too bad the poor graphics still make it unpleasant to play.

WINNER: GAME BOY
RUNNER UP: LYNX



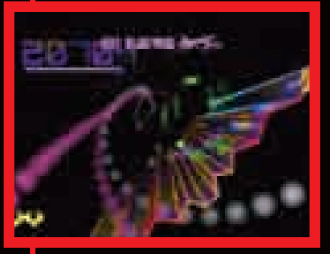
Greatest RETRO Game Ever



As an Atari Jaguar game, Tempest 2000 never stood a chance at commercial success, but critically it was the most beloved game on the system. Here's why...

TEMPEST 3000

Six years after** Tempest 2000, **Jeff Minter returned to the world of hyper-colour visuals and addictive shooting action on the instantly doomed Nuon console. The Nuon was a model of the DVD player with game console technology built into it: a Trojan horse designed to sneak videogames into the living room even though many were already there anyway. Like the Jaguar before it, the Nuon died a very quick and silent death but was also eerily host to another Minter masterpiece.** Tempest 3000 **took the** Tempest 2000 **model and sent the visuals to another level. We'd love to know if it plays just as well, but the game and system are as rare as hens' teeth.



▲ Our prayers to receive *Tempest 3000* for Christmas have so far gone unanswered.

Release: 1994
Format: Jaguar
Publisher: Atari
Developer: Llamasoft

Jeff Minter – the hippyish coder from Wales with an affinity for fluffy animals – has a reputation as a cursed developer. His most recent endeavour, *Unity*, was canned part way through development; *Tempest 3000* appeared on the Nuon, a system that nobody bought; and *Tempest 2000* debuted on the Jaguar shortly before Atari faded into nothingness. Such reputations are far too pessimistic for our liking; we prefer to think of Jeff as one of the last great individuals of the game industry: a freethinking, experimental type who's unafraid to take risks in order to create his own vision of the perfect game. Though the venerable game designer is responsible for a string of cult hits like *Llamatron*, *Hovver Bovver* and *Sheep In Space*, his greatest and most influential achievement has to be *Tempest 2000*.

Tempest, originally developed by Dave Theurer as an Atari coin-op in 1981, is still one of the most original shoot-'em-ups of all time. The player took control of a ship that could travel around the perimeter of the top of a 3D geometric cone. Monsters would appear at the bottom of the cone and slowly work their way to the summit and had to be blasted before they reached the top and dragged the player down into the abyss. With Atari still owning the rights to the game in 1994 and Jeff being a huge shoot-'em-up fan, the choice to update *Tempest* for a modern generation made sense.



▲ The closest thing to a boss resembles a demonic ram.



▲ Each level allows the use of a very handy smart bomb.

Despite being based on the ancient 1981 arcade game, *Tempest 2000* felt anything but dated, largely due to its psychedelic visuals and contemporary techno music. Jeff called upon his extensive experience of coding light-synth simulators to make the Jaguar push out as many trippy effects as it could handle, resulting in a look that felt futuristic and complemented the game fantastically well. Although there was no need to add anything to the already great gameplay, *Tempest*'s graphics made it feel fresh and exciting again; creating something that went into the realm of the 'experience'.

As a classic arcade game, *Tempest* hailed from a time when games drew the player into 'the zone': a place where only the game existed in the mind of the player whose hands became one with the controller and reactions quickened to an almost superhuman level as once impossibly difficult levels became second nature. *Tempest 2000* grasped this concept with both hands and dragged it into the Nineties' rave culture where entering a trance went hand in hand with the laser lights and dance music of the club scene. Jeff's amazing visual effects combined with the entrancing gameplay and music created a game that took hold of the player and hypnotised them back into the zone. This time the zone wasn't induced by addictive gameplay but instead took the player on a journey through warping levels, exploding particles and iridescent colours.

Get into a winning streak and *Tempest 2000* will reward the player

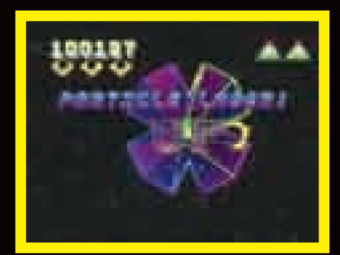


▲ Psychedelic visuals and a techno soundtrack prevented *Tempest 2000* from feeling dated.

"A JOURNEY THROUGH WARPING LEVELS AND EXPLODING PARTICLES"

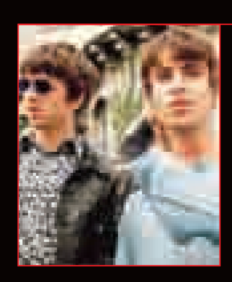
with more colourful and enchanting visuals as the levels progress further. Play the game even more successfully and the visuals become much more extravagant, pulling the player deeper into the experience and encouraging them to play on toward their next hit. The presentation and the gameplay become inseparable entities – almost impossible to appreciate in isolation – the gameplay is the graphics and the graphics are the gameplay.

While the Jaguar bombed as a gaming format, *Tempest 2000* has lived beyond its limited shelf life. An increasing number of gamers are discovering the classic shooter for the first time as they scour car boot sales and online auction sites for the original cartridge, ensuring that the game steadily becomes much more popular than its sales figures suggest: a true cult hit. And while Minter has since returned to producing yet more highly personal, psychedelic games, certain quarters of the game industry were quietly taking notes in 1994 and waiting for the right moment to build upon the ideas that came about from *Tempest 2000*. For example, we're willing to bet real money that Tetsuya Mizuguchi has played *Tempest 2000* because his own cult games *Rez*, *Lumines* and *Meteos* bear more than a passing resemblance to the classic Jaguar game.



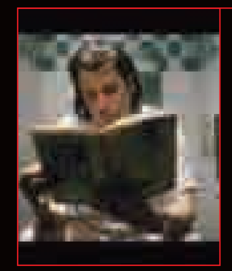


OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1994



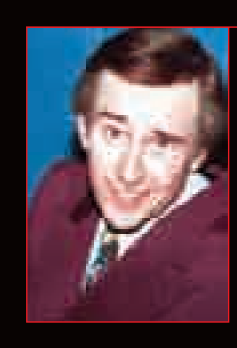
ON THE RADIO

A decade's worth of Britpop rivalry kicked off in 1994 when Oasis *released Definitely Maybe* against Blur's *Parklife*. With songs like *Live Forever*, *Supersonic* and *Shakermaker*, Oasis captured the essence of a Manchester revival scene, whereas songs from *Parklife*, like *Boys And Girls* and *End Of A Century* appealed to a more clean-cut, 'new mod' crowd.



AT THE MOVIES

Quentin Tarantino's post-modern epic *Pulp Fiction* took the world by storm in 1994. Featuring turns from superstars Bruce Willis and Uma Thurman as well as the revival of Seventies sensation John Travolta, the film shot to number one simply by daring to not have much of a plot at all. The film is best remembered for its throwaway dialogue and cult soundtrack.



ON THE TELEVISION

The entire country cringed at once in 1994 as Alan Partridge made his way from cameo appearances in *Brass Eye* to his very own weekly chat show. The fictional host, played by Steve Coogan, found himself in increasingly embarrassing situations on national television as his incredibly poor social skills and out-of-control ego helped any and all episodes to spiral into complete farcical depravity.



▲ Here's a glimpse of Minter's latest XBLA game. Looks very *Tempesty*.



THE LIGHTGUN BRIGADE

LIGHTGUN SHOOTERS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN IMMENSELY POPULAR. WHETHER EATING YOUR SHRAPNEL IN AN ARCADE, ZAPPING DUCKS ON YOUR NES, OR PARTYING WITH DR DON AND DR DAN, NOTHING GIVES A CASUAL GAMING BUZZ LIKE WIELDING A 'PIECE' IN FRONT OF THE SCREEN. GAMES™ TAKES A LOOK AT A GOLDEN (AND NOT-SO-GOLDEN) SIX-YEAR PERIOD WHEN THE TRIGGER FINGERS OF PLAYSTATION OWNERS RECEIVED A CONSIDERABLE WORKOUT, ACROSS SOME IMMEASURABLY GOOD AND UNFORGIVABLY BAD TITLES…

Retro Feature



Considering 99.9 per cent of UK arcades these days are chock-full with lightgun shooters (a fact backed by the '1997 Time Crisis Reform Law', forbidding arcade operators to trade without at least one knackered, cock-eyed *Crisis* cab), it's odd that with hindsight the genre has been relatively ignored or handled extremely badly within the home console market. The Nintendo Zapper was very popular and featured some legendary efforts, like *Duck Hunt* and *Hogan's Alley*. Trip Hawkins tried to revolutionise gaming with his 3DO, but the gamegun was limited mainly to dodgy FMV shenanigans, like *Mad Dog Mcree*. The Master System featured the mildly interesting Light Phaser – a 3D-glasses/gun combo with a sprinkling of commendable software such as *Safari Hunt* and a not-too-shabby version of *Operation Wolf*. At war in the early-to-mid-Nineties' 16-bit boom period, the NES and Mega Drive both failed with the laughable, oversized Super Scope and overpriced, under-supported Menacer respectively.

Indeed, it wasn't until the 32-bit revolution that we started to see some genuinely playable lightgun games with any degree of depth. And while the Sega CD had Kojima's *Snatcher*, and the Saturn could boast corking versions of the first two *Virtua Cop* coin-ops, PlayStation saw the most support for the infrared technology of any home console of that or any other period, with more than 20 games released across the three main territories, and with a wide selection of developers involved. Crucially, around half of the titles that did appear were of above-average quality, and wildly varied. Rather than shoot static targets or horribly rendered digitised bad guys, owners of the Sony hardware could battle megalomaniac crime bosses in a number of locales – anime-styled creatures in a fantastical gothic setting, or piranhas trying to take a bite out of someone's arse.

It wasn't all as rosy as the last sentence suggests, however. The



"MIDWAY, ATARI AND ACCLAIM ARE NAMES THAT STRUCK FEAR INTO THE HEARTS OF NINETIES GAMERS"

first example of lightgun action on Sony's grey box was the immensely stylish yet incredibly simplistic *Project: Horned Owl*. Produced by Alfa System Co – which would go on to produce not only a far better successor to *Horned Owl* itself but also the superb 2D shooter *Shikigami No Shiro* – the game was limited to NTSC territories upon release in 1995. With legendary manga artist Masanume Shirow (*Ghost In The Shell* and *Appleseed*) on board, the cut-scenes and presentation looked the business. Unfortunately, the gameplay consisted of shooting some very bland looking enemies, with a graphics engine that could have been emulated on a 16-bit machine. As we'll explore later in this feature, Alfa System did eventually rectify the mistakes made in *Project: Horned Owl*, with the sophomore lightgun effort – more on that later…

FOX INTERACTIVE DROPPED its commendable *Die Hard Trilogy* in 1996, which used lightgun rail-shooting as the filling in its third-person actioner/driving sim sandwich. And it was a pleasurable *Virtua Cop* clone, that loosely followed the plot of *Die Hard 2*. Although playable and with a fair difficulty level, it was far from the lightgun killer app that the *VC* games had proved to be on the Saturn. A sequel appeared in 2000, which featured the same three-games-in-one formula, had some dodgy frame-rate issues, and lacked the charm of the original. Altron's *Mighty Hits* was a lesser known companion to the far more popular *Point Blank*, and featured a handful of enjoyable mini-games that were a little too easy, if anything. It surfaced in Japan in 1996 with the fairly well received sequel *Mighty Hits Special* appearing worldwide in 1999.

From these humble beginnings, including a relative lack of initial blasting fare for PAL-land gamers, 1997 was to be the year of the lightgun, so to speak. Midway, Atari and Acclaim are names that struck fear into the hearts of most Nineties gamers. Together, the arcade companies and their much maligned home software counterparts were responsible for a chequered list of coin-ops and subsequent conversions, which varied from very good (*NBA Jam* and some versions of the *Mortal Kombat* franchise) to very bad (*Wrestlemania* the arcade game and *Rampage World Tour*). Indeed, Atari was swallowed up by Midway around 1996, but by this point it had already developed, or was in the process of developing three games that would receive PlayStation conversions. The first PSOne gunplay product from this Holy Trinity of sub-par players was *Revolution X*, a game that's been ritually slaughtered within these very pages in the past – and with good reason. It was a god-awful, Aerosmith-sponsored shambles with no redeeming features unless you really, really need to shoot something while listening to an unrecognisable Joe Perry riff. Unsurprisingly, it was picked up by Acclaim, who ported it (badly) to the console, while amazingly neglected to include lightgun support. *Area 51* and *Maximum Force* – two near-identical efforts which featured poorly animated digitised baddies, garish backgrounds and limited playability, both arrived in homes in 1997 to virtually zero fanfare. Things didn't look good.

TIME EXTEND

IN 2001, PLAYSTATION owners were honoured when Namco released a PSOne-exclusive *Time Crisis* game, *Project Titan*. This was arguably a reaction on the part of Namco when it had realised that a conversion of its *Time Crisis 2* coin-op was going to be beyond the reach of the PSOne hardware (it was eventually released on PS2). It was well received and featured improved graphics over the original, a steeper difficulty curve, and a new system during boss fights, where the player switched hiding places by shooting the yellow arrows at the side of the screen allowing the player to circumnavigate their foes. With completion of the Normal Arcade mode opening a challenging Time Attack mode, there was much to enjoy within this release that provided a comforting retro gaming experience that warms the cockles even today.

Konami decided to get involved by developing the *Crypt Killer* coin-op. Surely this would represent a change in fortune? Yes, but that fortune was not to be good. Sure, the game had a cracking title, and with its tasty pump-action gun peripherals, a choice of routes through the on-rails levels, and decent 3D graphics it was a fun distraction for 50p. In the home however, there was no pump-action; there were comedic, pixellated graphics with more pop up than you'd find on a toddler's bookshelf. In a last throw of its lightgun dice, Konami unleashed a two-game bundle featuring both of its early-Nineties *Lethal Enforcers* coin-ops. Little more than old-school shooting galleries with poor digitised graphics, the games – one of which featured stylised gangsters in a variety of edgy settings, the other an excruciating wild west motif – were playable in small

doses, yet once again did not make use of the superior 32-bit power available. The one saving grace from Konami was that it released its camply hued but stunning looking Justifier gun to the public, however this is now very hard to get hold of and retains compatibility for only a few games.

THANK GOODNESS THEN, for Namco and Alfa System Co who both delivered the goods with their 1997 releases. Namco already had a monster arcade smash with *Time Crisis* in 1995. Telling the highly unoriginal story of two crack agents, a hammy crime overlord and a knife-edge hostage situation, it featured superb graphics, addictive gameplay and a sophisticated foot-pedal system that allowed the player to duck for cover behind various obstacles. The home conversion benefited from the similarities between Sony's hardware and the System 22 arcade board, and as a result was as good an arcade translation as was ever seen on the console. Crucially, the PSOne game featured a brand new mission with a variety of routes and endings, and came packaged with a splendid replica of the supremely chunky gun that was housed in the original cabinet.

This peripheral remains possibly the best lightgun available for home use, not even surpassed by its PS2 successor. The Namco GunCon45, as it was known, connected to not only your console but also the video output, meaning increased accuracy – the most important feature of any lightgun as many disgruntled arcade patrons will attest. It also feels substantial without being too heavy or cumbersome, and the buttons are placed just about perfectly. On the downside, in Europe and the US the GunCon was a drab grey while the NTSC-J product was a sleek black. Other developers seized the opportunity to release guns with pedals. This was not available with the GunCon which achieved this function by using the side buttons). Even so, the excellence of the game itself and the dynamic loveliness of the weapon helped make *Time Crisis* the premier shooting title on the system. Admittedly, this was as easy as shooting fish in a barrel at this stage, if you'll pardon the pun. But things were to get even better.

Elemental Gearbolt was Alfa System Co's second attempt at marrying target practice with a fantastical manga setting – only this time it came up trumps. Although at its heart it was very much a traditional on-rails experience, Elemental Gearbolt benefits from terrific graphics and effects, a rousing musical score, and a highly charged, ethereal, fantasy atmosphere. Combining old-school gunplay with RPG-style levelling up and cut-scenes, it did not seem the kind of title that would garner a Western release in a million lifetimes. This did not deter translation-meister Working Designs (*Popful Mail*, *Silhouette Mirage*), which imbued the US version with a bevy of hidden extras, its trademark lush packaging, and a brilliant, tongue-in-cheek manual. Although this did not reach the UK, it is essential for fans of the genre and of the quirky releases so beloved of Working Designs.

In the next four years, PlayStation owners were spoiled by the embarrassment of lightgun riches. If you discount *Judge Dredd*, that is. Originally intended to be a Midway/Acclaim coin-op venture until they realised that the shocking quality of the end product would be laughed out of the arcade, the poorly balanced Acclaim effort reared its ugly head with ghastly graphics, overly tough enemies and full motion video sequences that were better than the game itself.

1998 SAW NAMCO grant a Western release of its 1994 arcade hit *Point Blank* (*GunBullet* in Japan) in flawless style. A brilliant party game, it features a plethora of mini-challenges that range from shearing sheep with bullet hits and shooting a stationary target 50 times to protecting the ubiquitous Dr Don and Dr Dan, the endearing characters that appear in every game in the series from a variety of precarious situations. A test of memory and reflexes and a superb score-attack experience on your own, *Point Blank* really comes to life in two-player, as you battle to achieve top marks across the many stages, and see who can survive the longest with the three lives available. The sequel, which arrived as *Gunbarl* in Japan in 1998, is arguably the daddy of PSOne lightgun titles. It features the same frenetic gameplay of its predecessor, only with even more mini-games and improved sound and graphics. It also adds a stupendous RPG mode which sees you guide your avatar around a maze, encountering various challenges and boss characters. The third in the series, named *Gunbalina* in the East, tops the previous efforts graphically and sonically by a country mile, but rather confusingly removes the single-player Story mode that made *Point Blank 2* such a winning effort. That said, along with *Time Crisis*, the trilogy represents the last word in PSOne lightgun games at home. The spawny Japanese got a PlayStation2 compilation of all *Point Blank* titles along with *Time Crisis*, which is well worth seeking out if you can import.

In 2000, Namco's *Rescue Shot* was aimed at kids and had players shooting obstacles to protect a dog called Bo, with gameplay reminiscent of *Yoshi's Safari* on SNES. 2000 brought *Ghoul Panic* which was Namco's super-charged version of the RPG mode in *Point Blank 2*, featuring all manner of cartoon ghosts and monsters, and is a superb effort in collaboration with 2D shoot-'em-up game legend 8ing/Raizing. *Gunfighter: The Legend Of Jesse James* in 2001 was a low-rent but highly enjoyable *Time Crisis* clone set in the wild west, and Capcom got in on the act with its *Biohazard/Resident Evil: Gun Survivor*, which was an overly easy but zombie-splatteringly satisfying romp through Raccoon City.

With GunCons available at most car boot sales across the land, and only the last instalment of the *Point Blank* trilogy – and perhaps Elemental Gearbolt – raising the expensiveness stakes, there is simply no excuse not to get involved in the world of PlayStation lightgun shooters. Although they get buried in this very article, even the turkey-tastic likes of *Area 51* and (shudder) *Crypt Killer* are diverting enough to take up at least half an hour of our worthless lives with their blasting action.

CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON

THERE WERE HUNDREDS of different guns available for PSOne, which ranged from the exceptional (G-Con45) to the ridiculous. The Blaze Erazer looked and felt like a child's toy, camo-pattern machine gun, and featured stupid sounds, eye-squintingly bad accuracy, and a force feedback feature that made calibration impossible. Naki produced the winsome Lunar Gun which was similar in style to Konami's Justifier but with a natty laser sight that produced a red dot on the screen. JoyTech (and some other companies, no doubt) released an all-singing, all-dancing gun that could emulate G-Con compatibility – thus eliminating the need to own more than one gun – and had a foot pedal. Unfortunately, it was heavier than the Pope's balls, and not ideal for extended use. Needless to say, the GunCon was and still is the king.

"THERE'S NO EXCUSE NOT TO GET INVOLVED IN THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION LIGHTGUN SHOOTERS"



ANCIENT HISTORY

IN A NEW, REGULAR MINI-FEATURE WE'LL BE TAKING A LOOK AT THOSE LONG-FORGOTTEN ARCADE GAMES THAT APPEARED BEFORE 1980 AND QUICKLY DISAPPEARED INTO OBSCURITY...



▲ *Gun Fight* may have been the first deathmatch game too.

Release: 1975
Format: Arcade
Publisher: Taito
Developer: In-House

GUN FIGHT

CHANGING THE FACE OF GAMING

It may be a black-and-white, two-player-only shooting game, but *Gun Fight* is much more important than it appears. The 1975 Taito arcade game was originally released under the name of *Western Gun* in Japan. Its gameplay was very simple: two players moved a cowboy around one half of a screen and tried to shoot their opponent without being killed. Obstacles such as a cactus or a roaming stagecoach obstructed the shoot-out and the bullets could be bounced off the edge of the screen. The game is significant for being the first to use realistic images of people, but in fact it was what lay behind its screen that was to become much more important to the history of videogaming.

Western Gun was distributed throughout America by Midway, who decided to rename the game *Gun Fight* and actually reprogrammed the coin-op to use microprocessors rather than integrated circuits – a first in arcade history. When news of the breakthrough got back to *Gun Fight*'s creator, Tomohiro Nishikado, at Taito, the game designer was so impressed that he decided to use a microprocessor in his next game, *Space Invaders*. We all know what happened next, so in a way, *Gun Fight* is responsible for the videogame industry as it exists today.

WORST LICENCE EVER

Release: 1985
Format: Spectrum, C64, CPC
Publisher: Tynesoft
Developer: Donald Campbell

SUPERGRAN

AS SLOW AND LIFELESS AS YOUR OWN GRAN

No one else in the world loves Eighties TV more than **games™**, but even we have to admit that *Supergran* was a bit rubbish. Sure, the theme tune sung by Billy Connolly was pretty good, but the actual show, with its terrible acting and shoddy effects, was quite bad indeed. Millions of us watched it though, so it was inevitable that a videogame adaptation would work its way onto shop shelves. Unbelievably, there were two *Supergran* games. One was a pretty decent text adventure and the other was Tynesoft's appalling action game.

This game took place over five screens, each one with its own individual style of gameplay and each one as poorly made as the other. The first screen (pictured) put you in control of Supergran and her Flycycle as she took pot shots at another gran who inexplicably looked exactly the same. Such simplistic gameplay felt unimaginative even in 1985 and the other four levels unfortunately didn't fare much better. Featuring blocky Atari 2600-style graphics and more uninspiring gameplay to boot, this was a game that managed to be even worse than the television show.



▲ For instant enemies, just change the colour of your hero.



STREET FIGHTER III: 2ND IMPACT [Arcade] Capcom, 1998 – Original Japanese Advert



UNSUNG HEROES SPECIAL: Part Two



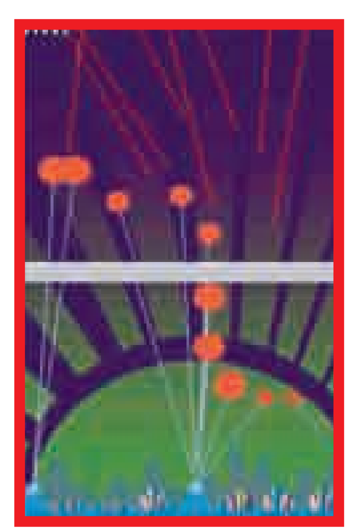
▲ Shane Monroe, the face behind the voice.

SHANE R MONROE

WELCOME TO THE SECOND PART OF OUR EXTENDED EDITION OF UNSUNG HEROES. THIS MONTH WE PROBE DEEPER INTO THE MIND OF RETROGAMING RADIO'S SHANE R MONROE TO DISCOVER HIS OPINION OF THE MODERN RETRO SCENE, THE DEATH OF THE ARCADE AND THE REPRESENTATION OF GAMING IN THE MEDIA. WE ALSO TAKE A MOMENT TO REMEMBER HIS PRODUCER, BRYAN SMITH, WHO SADLY PASSED AWAY IN JANUARY 2005

gamesTM: We know you as the co-host of DualScreen Radio of course. As a Nintendo DS fan, how does it feel to see Sony's PSP get the lion's share of retro compilations?

Shane R Monroe: I think the horrible *Retro Atari* pack really screwed us DS lovers over because its poor quality and sales scared retro developers away. It also doesn't help that apparently it is super easy to port the PS2 versions to PSP, making the cost (and risk) a lot more enticing to developers. With DS outpacing the sales of PSP quite well still, I suspect that developers will get greedy for those handheld dollars and the retro packs will come. I also have a strange feeling that Wii/DS connectivity will bring amazing things related to retro gaming to the handheld.



▲ Did Atari ruin the DS's retro credentials?

gTM: What do you think about the latest trend for downloading classic games through Xbox Live Arcade as well as Nintendo's much-anticipated Virtual Console?

SRM: Love the concept; hate the methodology. I've never been a fan of the 'pay for play' and 'digital distribution' model. Call me an old fogey if you want, but there is magic in ownership. I still have my *Legacy Of The Ancients* box in my drawer. I still have my *Crash Team Racing* CD. If I want to play *Roadkill* on my CD32, despite Commodore being gone, I can still hook that machine up and play it.

Our world is quickly moving to what I call 'pure disposability'. Nothing is designed to be kept, loved or cherished any more. Beat it in a weekend, sell it back to GameStop for a third of the value and buy something else. There is no more nostalgia – it's gimme, gimme, gimme all the time. Do you think in 20 years our kids are going to have anything videogame wise to look back fondly at? Are they going to hook up that crusty Xbox and play *Halo* again? Will a DDR machine still fetch $1,000 25 years from now?

Digital distribution is just the last nail in the disposability coffin. Take away the people's rights to do with their purchases what they will… the ability to preserve and collect things they love? 'No thanks. I'll take it on a disc please – and no, it better not require a broadband Internet connection to play it either. In a couple of decades, I'd like to play it again – without having to worry about Microsoft, Sony or Nintendo still being in business'.

I am excited about the concept that people can legally and easily play the great games of yesterday – even some that haven't seen the light of day for years – and still not be able to stick a working copy away in the closet for the next generation to see. I just wish we didn't have to pay for the hardware, pay for a subscription, pay for the game, then pay to play it.



▲ Shane and producer Bryan in high spirits.



▲ The interview with Howard Scott Warshaw at CGE 2003.

"I'M EXCITED ABOUT THE CONCEPT THAT PEOPLE CAN EASILY PLAY THE GREAT GAMES OF YESTERDAY"

g™: How did the passing of your producer, Bryan Smith, affect both yourself and the show?

SRM: My first reaction was that the show simply couldn't go on without him. Even though he came late into the show's staff, his spirit has long been represented through the hundreds of hours of discussions and debates between us. Bryan brought the show back when I wanted to can it. When I gave up hope in the gaming scene, he took me to CGE and showed me that us classic gamers still had a place in the world. He inspired me and complemented me – often being the show's voice of reason.

But, as they say, the show must go on – and every time I thought to myself that I would cancel the show I would hear Bryan's off-air trademark expression, 'Have you lost your f***ing mind?' and I'd smile and realise that he would want me to continue the show and keep the torch lit for people like us. Fortunately, by the time he'd passed, the show practically ran itself – our format was strong, our user base and user communities were strong – and while I was numb for a long time, the show went on fairly smoothly.

I'll never fully deal with his passing – in many ways, he was the sibling I never had (or wanted, right mom?) and filled a void that has since gone empty. He will never be forgotten.

g™: How do you feel about the demise of the arcade scene? Do you think it will make a comeback?

SRM: I do miss them. All right, I don't miss the smokers, the sleazy people that hung around them sometimes, and that sort of thing. But I do miss what they stood for. A real, face-to-face social gathering where gaming skill was tested in a level playing field, and a sense of accomplishment could be obtained. They represented a proving ground for technology that wasn't just about pushing more pixels around but rather having to innovate to keep the competition fierce. The arcade of old was where you saw a technology showcase that only cost you a quarter or two to participate in; the buy-in wasn't $500 and $60 a pop. The best ones, like Chuck E Cheese in the early days were family social clubs where you could snarf on some pizza and kick your brother's ass at *Karate Champ* all in the same night while like-minded people looked over your shoulder.

Unfortunately the arcade is dead – people prefer to hide in their mom's basement, strapped up to a socially devoid headset, playing the same games over and over again for bragging rights that no one sees or cares about. People are no longer content to effectively play against themselves or with friends sitting next to them… it's 16-player deathmatch with people you don't know or care about.

Arcades COULD make a comeback but not in the manner that you and I knew as a kid. I do believe that recreation centres built on solid family values could bring about a new order of arcades that could rival those of the past. But it would take a lot of non-conventional thinking and, heaven forbid, some risk – neither of which are popular in modern gaming.

g™: As a member of the gaming media, why do you think there is still no high-quality videogame-related TV show that takes gaming as seriously as other forms of entertainment?

SRM: That's easy – the masses don't want high-quality television. They want disposable, surface-scratching, iPod-totin', urbanised tripe that fits between their reality shows. Seriously, when you have to mass market something, you strip the soul right out of it. How can you put together a quality show on something so… disposable? TV has a formula that doesn't mesh with gaming – dual host (big breasted blonde that wears nothing and has probably never played a videogame and the statuesque almost-Tony-Hawk dude), MTV micro-magazine with all the slammin' graphic transitions and barely enough meat to fit between the every-six-minute commercial break.

Fact is, the people that make the best hosts, have the most information or could really provide this sort of content aren't the people that fit the TV mould and as such, we'll continue to get the same stuff we always get – no matter HOW popular gaming gets.

TUNE IN AND DOWNLOAD SHANE'S RADIO SHOW AT WWW.RETROGAMINGRADIO.COM



▲ A great EA game before FIFA madness took hold.

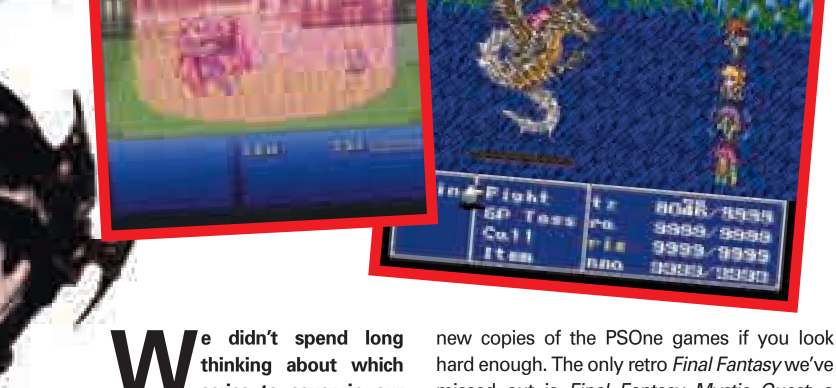




COLLECTORS' SPOTLIGHT

FINAL FANTASY

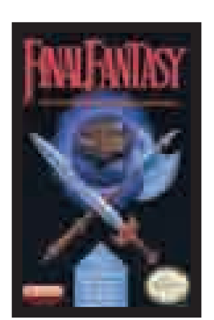
SOME GAME SERIES ARE FAR TOO LONG RUNNING AND PROLIFIC TO BE COVERED IN OUR REGULAR BUYERS' GUIDE, SO EVERY SO OFTEN WE'LL SHINE THE COLLECTORS' SPOTLIGHT ON A CLASSIC SERIES AND UNCOVER EVERY LAST IMPORTANT DETAIL FOR YOU DEDICATED COLLECTORS. THIS MONTH: SQUARESOFT'S EPIC FINAL FANTASY SERIES…



Retro Feature

We didn't spend long thinking about which series to cover in our very first Collectors' Spotlight. As the game with more sequels and a larger fan base than any other title in existence, *Final Fantasy* was the obvious choice. From 1987 onward, the series has spawned countless sequels and spin-offs as well as toys, CDs, films and all kinds of other memorabilia. Yet there are very few resources available for people who are looking to start a collection. Which are the rarest games? What should be included in a 'complete' condition item? This guide should help to answer such questions and more. Although we can't possibly feature every single piece of *Final Fantasy* paraphernalia (that would take the entire magazine, if not a book) we have found room to tell you about the most important games in the series as well as the most interesting collectables that are out there. The Spotlight will remain strictly retro though. With so many games to cover, there's no point in talking about any games that are still available to buy brand new so we won't be discussing any games that were made after *Final Fantasy VI*. You can still buy brand new copies of the PSOne games if you look hard enough. The only retro *Final Fantasy* we've missed out is *Final Fantasy Mystic Quest*: a beginner's RPG for the SNES, that managed to find its way to the UK but is universally despised by fans for its overly simplistic gameplay and poor story. We've also neglected to feature the monochrome Game Boy games since the *Final Fantasy Legend* titles were actually re-branded entries into Square's *SaGa* games while *Final Fantasy Adventure* was actually a prequel to *Secret Of Mana*.

It's also important to remember that we're looking at the collecting scene from a British perspective. Although there are plenty of American collectors' guides out there, they just aren't relevant to British gamers as many of the *Final Fantasy* games were never released in the West and so are much harder to come by than in the States. The original NES game, for example, is much more common in America, so although you should be able to find one on eBay easily enough, the chances of you finding one at your local game shop are much, much lower than in the US. So if our estimated prices appear higher than the recognised eBay value it's because the perceived value of the games in British shops is much higher. Every game that we'll feature in this issue is actually an import (save for the PSOne and GBA re-releases) so please remember that if you're planning to buy any of the featured titles you'll need the appropriate hardware if you intend to actually play them.



TITLE: Final Fantasy
FORMATS: NES, MSX2, PSOne, Wonderswan, GBA
YEAR: Japan: 1987/US: 1990
ESTIMATED VALUE: £90+ (NES version)

Although the original *Final Fantasy* featured few of the series' hallmarks that exist today – characters are generic and nameless while there's relatively little story to speak of – the very first game still commands high prices based on its collectability as the first game in the billion-selling series. Purists looking for the original unaltered game will have to stick to the NES or MSX versions as the others feature enhanced graphics and/or FMV sequences. These versions are also, of course, the most collectable. Complete NES editions, with box, instructions, maps and charts are becoming very hard to source with prices steadily rising over the last few years. The MSX version is probably the most collectable, however. Released on floppy disk in 1989, the game was identical to the NES/Famicom version, except that the soundtrack was greatly improved if you had the right hardware. Tracking down a copy of this ancient import will be quite a task as it rarely even appears on Japanese auction sites, so expect to pay twice as much as the NES version, at least.





TITLE: Final Fantasy II
FORMATS: Famicom, Wonderswan, PSOne, GBA
YEAR: 1988
ESTIMATED VALUE: £20+

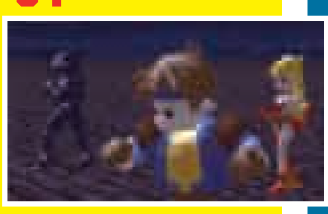
Following the surprise North American success of the first *Final Fantasy*, Square USA began work on a translation of *Final Fantasy II* – re-titled *Final Fantasy II: Dark Shadow Over Palakia* – but the release was cancelled at the last possible moment in favour of releasing *Final Fantasy IV* on the SNES. By this point (1991) the Western translations of the *Final Fantasy* games were so far behind the original Japanese productions that such decisions were an unfortunate necessity.

Although *Final Fantasy II* was eventually translated into English, it was as part of a graphical update and the only way to see the game in its original form is to play the Japanese Famicom cartridge. Thankfully, the original release was produced in very large quantities and is relatively easy to track down. The game rarely appears on shop shelves (due to the under-developed Famicom import scene at the time) but it is very common on the online marketplace.



PRICELESS

FINAL FANTASY 64



In 1995 SquareSoft produced a technical demo known as *FFVI: The Interactive CG Game*. The demo, shown at the ACM SIGGRAPH 95 conference, was intended to show how Square envisaged the next generation of console RPGs and was controlled by a mouse that was used to draw shapes to perform specific attacks. When images from the demo reached the West, some magazines speculated that it was representative of a new *Final Fantasy* game for N64, which was of course proved to be untrue when Square announced that *Final Fantasy VII* would debut on the Sony PlayStation.

Although, the graphical style created a basis for *FFVII, The Interactive CG Game* was not developed further and remains a curio in the *Final Fantasy* story. Nevertheless, that demo exists on a workstation somewhere and we know it's playable. If such code ever made its way onto eBay then its final value would surely eclipse any other videogame auction to date.

INSTANT COLLECTABLE

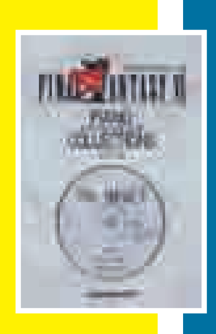
A MINI ADVENTURE



Released to coincide with the GBA version of *Final Fantasy IV* on the 14 December 2005, the limited edition Final Fantasy Game Boy Micro cost ¥17,200 (£78) and sold out incredibly quickly. Although the customised handheld has yet to significantly rise in value, we're sure that its *Final Fantasy* branding and low production run will make it a must-have collectable of the future.

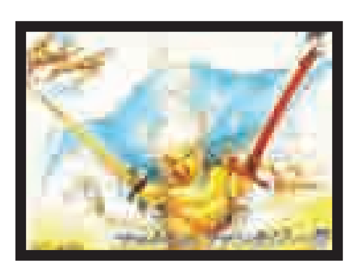
TOP TUNES

PRECIOUS IVORIES



The first pressing of this out-of-print CD featured arranged piano versions of the *Final Fantasy VI* soundtrack along with a hardback book with the sheet music for every song on the disc. The 1994 soundtrack was re-issued in 2001 without the hardback book and is much easier to find than the elusive original.





TITLE: Final Fantasy III
FORMATS: Famicom, DS
YEAR: 1990
ESTIMATED VALUE: £20+

Until the Western release of the upcoming DS version, *Final Fantasy III* will be unique among *Final Fantasy* games for being the only one not to be translated into English. As such, the game is only worth buying for completist reasons (unless you can read Japanese, of course). Like *Final Fantasy II* though, the game is fairly easy to come across and rarely commands high prices unless in factory-sealed condition.

Final Fantasy III is notable for being the largest role-playing game on the Famicom system. So large in fact that the Wonderswan remake of the game had to be cancelled in 2001 because Square couldn't manage to make the game fit on the small cartridge, even though *Final Fantasy IV* fit perfectly. Long time fans may also be interested in acquiring *Final Fantasy III* as it marks the first appearance of both the Fat Chocobo and the adorable Moogles that went on to appear in nearly every subsequent release.



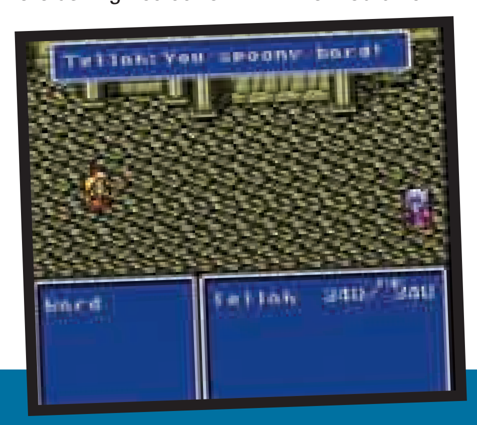
"THE FFIII WONDERSWAN REMAKE WAS CANCELLED AS IT WOULDN'T FIT ON SUCH A SMALL CARTRIDGE"



TITLE: Final Fantasy IV
FORMATS: SNES, Wonderswan, PSOne, GBA
YEAR: 1991
ESTIMATED VALUE: £40+

Confusingly released as *Final Fantasy II* in the US, *FFIV* was the first *Final Fantasy* for the Super Nintendo and features several graphical and mechanical upgrades that set the game far in advance of its NES predecessors. Although the game is far from rare it still fetches relatively high prices simply because few fans are willing to part with a game that is both collectable and fun to play. Boxed copies can therefore be quite expensive, especially in England. The last time we checked GameStation, for example, they were asking £69.99 for *FFIV*. We wouldn't recommend paying that much for the game though, unless the packaging is in perfect condition and is complete with the original map.

Collectors of the Japanese releases should also be aware that there were two versions of *FFIV* released for the Super Famicom. The second release, *Final Fantasy IV Easytype*, was aimed at beginners and was made much easier by the removal of several spells, reduction of shop prices and the addition of extra weaknesses in some enemies.

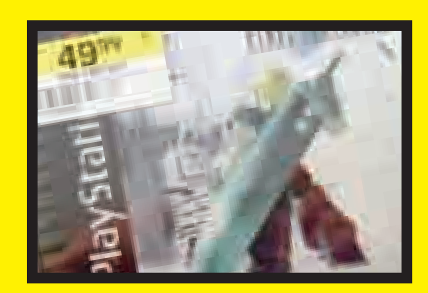


UNDER THE HAMMER

THE FIVE MOST OUTRAGEOUS ONLINE AUCTIONS AT THE TIME OF WRITING

1

ITEM: Final Fantasy VII (sealed)
WINNING BID: £296.59
Considering PAL copies of *Final Fantasy VII* can still be bought sealed in the UK for around the £30 mark, we were pretty shocked to see the results of this particular auction. The game was not a re-release and is still clearly sealed in its original wrapping, but we can think of much rarer *FF* games to spend nearly £300 on.

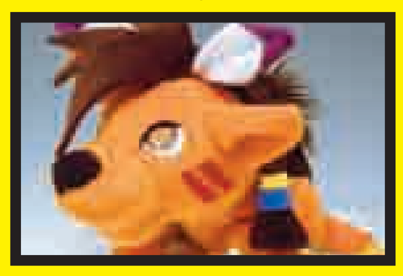


2

ITEM: Squall Leonhart & Bahamut Statue
WINNING BID: £220.51
This cold-cast resin statue of *Final Fantasy VIII's* main protagonist was produced in extremely limited quantities. Only 2,000 were ever made, and we dare say that a few clumsy hands have probably broken one or two. If you are looking for one of these statues then be aware that an almost identical resin kit was mass-produced and is significantly less valuable.



ITEM: Red XIII Plush
WINNING BID: £188.02
£188 is a lot of money for a plush toy but this particular doll was hand made and is one of a kind. The quality is far above the standard of mass-produced dolls and there's no arguing with the fact that Red XIII is one of the most loved *Final Fantasy* characters.



ITEM: Factory Sealed Final Fantasy (NES)
WINNING BID: £162.07
We have to admit that £162 seemed like an awful lot of money for a game that the buyer won't be able to play (because opening it would devalue it) but then we noticed the words "Reserve Not Met". With 24 bids and over 500 views, interest in this item was very high and just goes to show how powerful a brand the *Final Fantasy* label is.



ITEM: 56-Inch Cloud Buster Replica
WINNING BID: £86.07
This is more like it. If we're going to spend a stupid amount of money on *Final Fantasy* memorabilia then we might as well buy something that makes us feel like we're part of the game. Now if only wielding swords in public wasn't a crime…



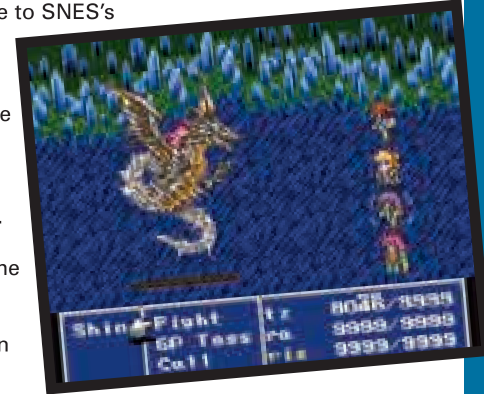
3



TITLE: Final Fantasy V
FORMATS: SNES, PSOne (GBA in development)
YEAR: 1992
ESTIMATED VALUE: £30+

Like *FFII* before it, *Final Fantasy V* suffered a troubled translation resulting in the final Western release being canned until the PSOne remake. The game's complex 'job' system (in which characters could be altered depending on their chosen profession) was deemed too complicated for Western gamers at the time, but it was briefly resurrected in 1995 as *Final Fantasy Extreme*. The game was due to be marketed as a much harder *Final Fantasy* for seasoned players, but was mysteriously canned presumably due to SNES's limited future compared to the PlayStation. Sadly, *Final Fantasy V* also received a second chance of a release in the West when Top Dog was hired to create a PC port of the game for Windows 95. The port was eventually pulled by Square after communication problems between the two developers led to several false starts and some extreme delays.

A British release eventually appeared on PSOne's *Final Fantasy Anthology* in 2002, but the original Japanese release with, in our opinion, the best box art of the series, is still the most collectable. The cartridge is easy to find and can be picked up for around £30 in good nick.



4

"THE ORIGINAL JAPANESE VERSION OF FINAL FANTASY V HAD THE BEST BOX ART OF THE SERIES"

5



TITLE: Final Fantasy VI
FORMATS: SNES, PSOne (GBA in development)
YEAR: 1994
ESTIMATED VALUE: £40+

Much like *Final Fantasy V*, a PC version of *FFVI* was cancelled during development, but that was of little consequence this time around as this astounding RPG – re-titled *Final Fantasy III* – made it to the American SNES and since became one of the most cherished parts of the series. The high production values of the story, gameplay, music and graphics make this the absolute best of the 2D *Final Fantasy* games, and the original SNES release remains highly collectable as a consequence. Similar to games like *Zelda: A Link To The Past*, *FFVI* isn't particularly rare – it sold over 550,000 copies in America – but is so adored by all who play it that they won't part with it cheaply. As with all the other retro *FF* games, *Final Fantasy VI* was never released in Europe and still commands prices of around £70 in British games shops.

Prospective buyers should be aware that the complete American release features both a foldout map and a poster.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



IS IT POSSIBLE TO LOVE NINTENDO TOO MUCH? THIS MONTH'S ULTIMATE COLLECTOR, JASON MUIR, A 30-YEAR-OLD NINTENDO NUT FROM LEEDS, WEST YORKSHIRE, CERTAINLY DOESN'T THINK SO. JASON HAS OVER 300 NINTENDO GAMES, A WEALTH OF ULTRA-RARE JAPANESE MEMORABILIA AND A TASTE FOR UNUSUAL COOKING GAMES THAT PROVE JUST HOW DEEP HIS OBSESSION RUNS…



▼ Wearing his Mario cap with pleasure, Jason's *SMW* ball maze game is his star item.

games™: How did your interest in videogames begin?
Jason Muir: It started with me playing on my sister's Commodore Vic 20 with classics such as *Mega Vault*. I eventually moved onto consoles, the old brick mono Game Boy was the very first console I owned, followed by a NES a few years later.

g™: How long have you been collecting games for?
JM: In total, roughly 23 years. I started collecting when I got my very first computer, which was a Spectrum +3 and before I knew it my room was at bursting point with boxes full of cassettes. As the years went on, all my Spectrum stuff was sold and replaced with console stuff. I didn't have much money as a kid, so I'd sell my old collection to finance a newer one. My collection would be reborn with each new console that came out, I sometimes look back and think how foolish I was to get rid of so much stuff. I eventually stopped having to sell everything all the time once I moved onto N64 – that's when my collection started to grow again. I learnt my lesson and refused to get rid of any game unless it was truly crap.



g™: Where have you bought most of the items in your collection?
JM: I mostly buy from online shops like Play Asia, NCSX, Japan Games or sometimes eBay. I also have a friend in Japan, who can get hold of the harder to find Japanese stuff from shops or Yahoo! auctions.

g™: How many games do you own?
JM: Over all of the formats that I own I'd say approximately 330, the vast majority of which are taken up by Nintendo games.

g™: What's your favourite console?
JM: That has to be the GameCube; I've enjoyed so many games on it. *Homeland*, *The Wind Waker*, *Chibi Robo*, *Giftpia*, I could go on forever…

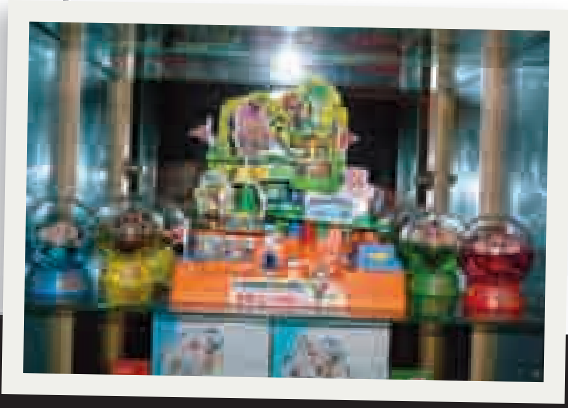
g™: What's your most prized videogame possession and why?
JM: My most prized possession is my *Super Mario World* motorised ball maze game. I remember seeing one in a competition way back in the early Nineties in a games magazine, and wanting it so bad. It took me 11 years to track one down but it was worth the wait.



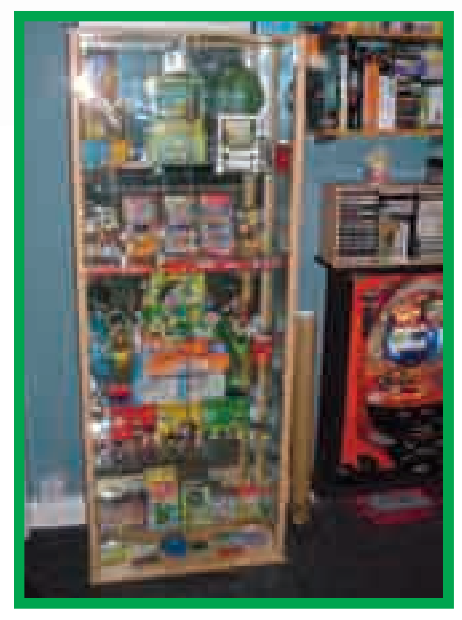
g™: What is your favourite game ever?
JM: That would be *Ganbare Goemon: Sarawareta Ebisumaru* on the mono Game Boy.

g™: What is your all-time favourite videogame genre and why?
JM: I like action games and action RPGs, as I love it when you can go off and explore. Games like *Zelda* and *Chibi Robo* are perfect examples.

g™: What is your favourite game series?
JM: Definitely the *Ganbare Goemon* series – known over here as *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* – it has everything you could ever want if you like Japanese games. The games are a mixture of platformer and RPG. Each title is crammed full of Japanese culture









Jason is the proud owner of some 'super monkey balls'.



and totally bizarre enemies such as red Jelly Babies wearing sailor suits right through to men in rabbit costumes. Another fantastic bit of the series is the mini-games: if you're finding the pace a bit too much, you can stop off and relax at a game room and have a go at tons of mini-games including horse racing, whack-a-mole, the first whole level of *Gradius* and many, many more. Or if you fancy something weird you can stop off to see a strip show, or watch Ebisumaru perform a crazy dance on stage then turn around and fart in your face. In the later games you also have control of your robot buddy, Impact, who you can summon when you have to fight a boss. The fights take place in first-person mode with you behind the controls having to battle in pseudo 3D via the wonderful Mode 7 effect.

gTM: Are there any items missing from your collection that you would love to find?

JM: There's lots of stuff I'd love to add to my collection, but my most-wanted game is *Togepi's Adventure* for the Pokémon Mini. If I ever win the lottery I'd also add my Super Famicom Holy Grail which is *Yoshi No Kurupon: Oven De Cookie*, a super-rare promo-only game that has *Yoshi's Cookie* and a cooking game on one cartridge. There are only around 500 of them and it's very expensive.

gTM: So, Jason, where do you get all of this Nintendo memorabilia?

JM: My friend in Japan is responsible for most of it as he picks it up in shops for me as they have so much amazing merchandise over there, I also get some Nintendo stuff from Club Nintendo, and eBay helps fill in the gaps.

gTM: What's the fascination with cooking games?

JM: Hard to say really, I think it's the fact that there are so many things to do at once so you're constantly juggling things around. It's satisfying when everything falls into place and you create the perfect dish. Plus, I love them because it's just such a weird thing to turn into a game. My favourite cooking game would have to be *Cooking Mama* on DS, but *Motoko Chan's Wonder Kitchen* on the Super Famicom is a very close second.

gTM: And how much do you think you've spent on your collection?

JM: It's pretty scary to sit down and think how much I've spent over the years, but if I had to guess I'd say somewhere near the £10,000 mark.

gTM: Have you ever discovered a real bargain?

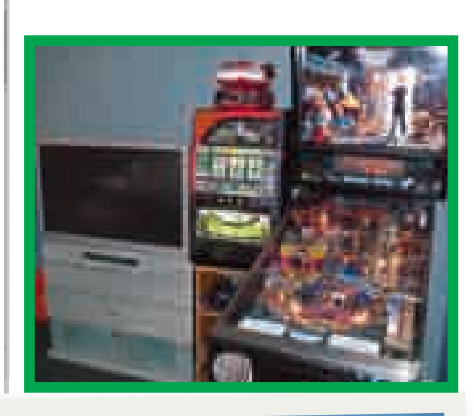
JM: My best bargain was finding an official Japanese set of *Samba De Amigo* maracas for £20.

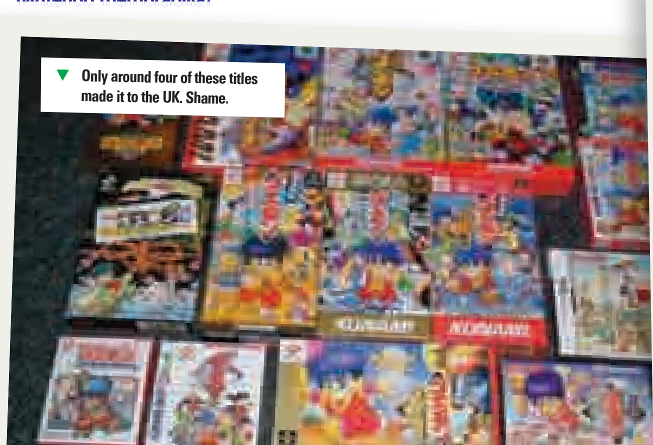
gTM: How easy was it to acquire your 64DD and the games to go with it?

JM: It was actually pretty easy as they tend to turn up on eBay quite often. But you usually have to be patient to find one for a good price.

gTM: Finally, which of the next-generation consoles are you looking forward to the most?

JM: Definitely the Wii, I can't wait to see how the next generation of Nintendo games are going to turn out.





Only around four of these titles made it to the UK. Shame.



A complete set of Famicom Mini games. Not something you see every day.







BUYERS' GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£40-£60
Goldstar 3DO	£45-£60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£15-£25
Acorn Electron	£10-£25

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-£25
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-£25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25-£50
Amstrad GX4000	£20-£60



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£20-£35
Atari ST	£20+ (depending on model)
Atari Lynx	£15+ (depending on model)
Atari Jaguar	£20

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic20	£10-£30
Commodore 64	£10-£30
Commodore Amiga	£20+ (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£20-£50
C64 GS	£30-£50
Commodore CD32	£25-£50



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£60-£200
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£150-£200
JAMMA Compatible cabinets	£100-£350 (depending on model)
Super Gun	£120-£400 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£55-£70
Turbo Grafx-16	£30-£50
Turbo Duo	£120-£180
PC Engine GT	£70-£150
Super Grafx	£80 (prices can fluctuate)



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£1-£200 (depending on model)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-£20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£5-£10
Game Boy Color	£10-£15
Super Nintendo	£20-£40
Virtual Boy	£80-£100
Nintendo 64	£10-£25

SEGA

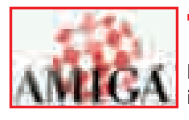
Master System	£10-£30 (depending on model)
Mega Drive	£10-£20
Game Gear	£15-£25
Mega CD	£40-£70 (depending on model)
Sega 32X	£35
Sega Nomad	£70-£140
Saturn	£30+ (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£25+ (depending on model)

SINCLAIR

ZX-81	£40-£70
ZX Spectrum 48K	£20-£50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX SPECTRUM +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (arcade system)	£70+ (depending on model)
Neo Geo AES (home System)	£150+
Neo Geo CD	£100+
Neo Geo CDZ	£80+
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£35



The world of retro gaming can be very confusing for the uninitiated and some consoles and computers can be more confounding than others thanks to their many models and variations. With that in mind we will occasionally hijack the Buyers' Guide to bring you a round up of a particular series of classic game machines. This month we take a look at the most interesting of Commodore's Amiga models.

Amiga 1000

Estimated Price: £100-£500
Year of Production: 1985

The Amiga 1000 was the one that started it all. Developed for Atari by a group of rogue engineers and snatched by Commodore at the very last moment, the Amiga 1000 wowed computing enthusiasts in 1985 and spawned a whirlwind computing scene that changed the world of gaming. These days the A1000 isn't especially essential to gamers as it's incompatible with the best software. It is a terrific collector's piece though, so if you happen to see one cheap then grab it immediately.



Amiga 500

Estimated Price: £20
Year of Production: 1987

Chances are that if you owned an Amiga back in the Eighties then this is the model you had. The A500 was actually more powerful than the A1000, but the loss of the external keyboard and monitor (the A500 plugged straight into a TV instead) made the unit much cheaper and more affordable as a game machine. Consequently, the 500 went on to become the best-selling Amiga of all time and hosted some of the most memorable games ever – 12 of your Top 100 in fact.



Amiga 2000

Estimated Price: £100-£300
Year of Production: 1987

The second of Commodore's 'high-end' machines, designed for professional use and including a monitor and external keyboard, the A2000 was designed with expandability in mind. The high price meant the machine wasn't used for many games, but with the 'video toaster' card it became a handy 3D rendering machine that was used to render the CG sequences of *Babylon 5* and is still sometimes used today. If you just want to play games stick to the A500, but this may be worth it if you want something more exotic.



Amiga CDTV

Estimated Price: £100-£700
Year of Production: 1990

The CDTV was a true vision of the future: a set-top box that was the first computer to feature a CD-ROM drive as standard, was compatible with all existing Amiga software, and designed as a multimedia device that would serve the entire family. At such an early time, however, most developers didn't know how to use the CD technology and the machine drowned in a pool of dull edutainment titles. Sales were miniscule and the console/computer hybrid went on to become the rarest Amiga model.



Amiga 4000

Estimated Price: £100-£300
Year of Production: 1992

As game consoles and PCs began to overtake the Amiga's ageing hardware in the early Nineties, Commodore bounced back with a new range of computers that featured Advanced Graphics Architecture. The first of these was the high-end Amiga 4000, another business machine that became popular with animators and other creative professionals. It came with a Hard Drive and could be expanded with graphics cards and CD-ROM drives paving the way for Amiga's first wave of 3D polygonal games.



Amiga 600

Estimated Price: £20
Year of Production: 1992

The CDTV may have been the biggest commercial flop, but the A600 was undoubtedly Commodore's biggest mistake. Releasing a cut-down version of the A500 when the Amiga was moving into its next generation was absolute madness, especially as the new machines were backward compatible with the old games. The A600 can be picked up reasonably cheaply nowadays but there isn't much point unless you're after a tiny space-saving Amiga that will sit comfortably next to your game consoles.



Amiga 1200

Estimated Price: £20
Year of Production: 1992

If you're looking for the best possible Amiga to buy but you're on a restricted budget, then the A1200 is definitely the one you should go for. Cheap yet powerful and almost as expandable as the A4000, it's little wonder that this model was the second best selling of all the Amigas produced. The new games were great too, and included expanded versions of classic games, a clutch of original first-person shooters and even a conversion of *WipEout* made the A1200 the must-have Amiga.



Amiga CD32

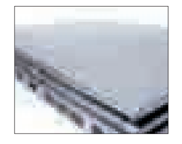
Estimated Price: £40
Year of Production: 1993

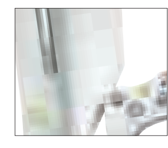
Not content to admit defeat after the CDTV, Commodore went back to the drawing board and redesigned an all-in-one Amiga based around AGA technology – and this time got it right. The CD32 featured all the plug-and-play usability of a game console but could be expanded with extras to make it a fully fledged computer. Sadly, Commodore went bust in 1994 before CD32 could gain a real foothold and the console died too. Still, a few hundred games were released and it's nice to have an Amiga that works so simply.

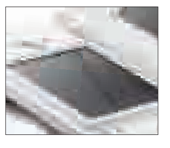
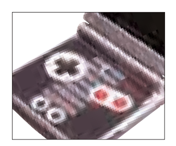
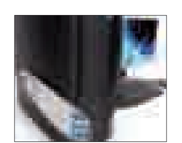


PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS



TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



PC

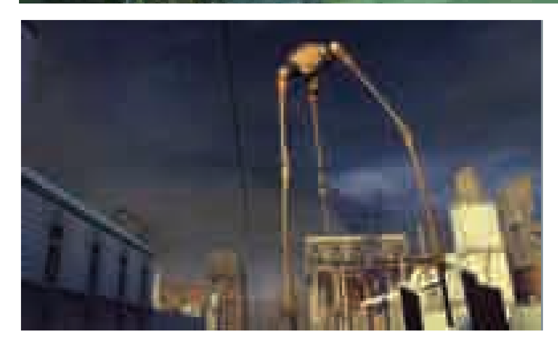
PC TEN MUST-HAVE GAMES

1 HALF-LIFE 2

Publisher: Vivendi
Developer: Valve
Genre: First-Person Shooter
Price: £34.99

Half-Life 2 **is an essential purchase for numerous reasons; beautiful visuals, an award-winning physics engine, diverse scenarios, balanced gameplay and deep storyline are among them. It was worth every ounce of the hype it received prior to its release despite the hideous release delays blamed on stolen source, and Vivendi controversially omitting to tell the consumer that an Internet connection was required to activate the game on the retail box. This is certainly one of the most exciting and satisfying FPSs ever and deserves its number-one position.**

ISSUE: **N/A** SCORE: **9**




2 SAM & MAX HIT THE ROAD

Publisher: Activision Developer: LucasArts
Genre: Adventure Price: £9.99

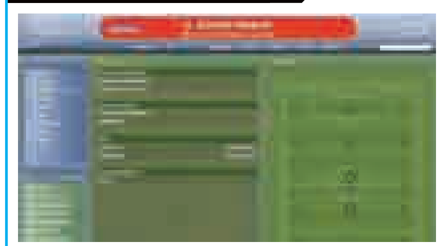


There's very little to distinguish the best from the rest of the point-and-click adventures of Sam and Max's era. LucasArts was turning ideas into gold in the early Nineties and *Sam & Max* is the **games™** favourite. A timeless classic.

ISSUE: **N/A** SCORE: **9**

3 FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

Publisher: Sega Developer: Sports Interactive
Genre: Management Sim Price: £19.99

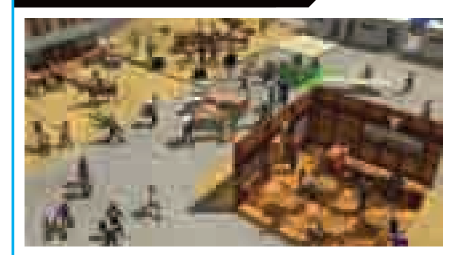


Don't let the name deceive you: these are the same guys that made the massively successful *Championship Manager* prior to their split with Eidos. Their latest endeavour is highly addictive even for those with no knowledge of football.

ISSUE: **N/A** SCORE: **9**

4 THE MOVIES

Publisher: Activision Developer: Lionhead Studios
Genre: Sim Price: £9.99

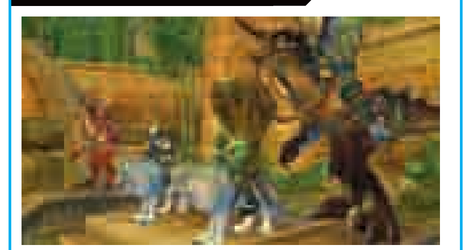


There are a billion and one sim games and clones across all the platforms, but *The Movies* is the most engaging of the lot. Hollywood may be thousands of miles away, but in this title you can build and manage your own films and watch them too.

ISSUE: **39** SCORE: **9**

5 WORLD OF WARCRAFT

Publisher: Vivendi Developer: Blizzard
Genre: MMORPG Price: £24.99

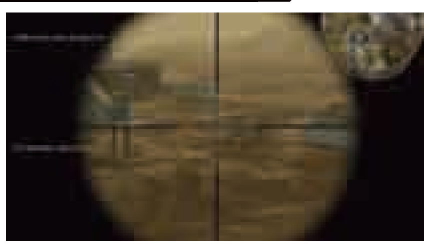


The most successful MMORPG to date, surpassing even the popularity of the original *EverQuest*. *WOW* has been around for several years now and still dishes up a dynamic fantasy world to millions of subscribers.

ISSUE: **30** SCORE: **9**

6 BATTLEFIELD 2

Publisher: Electronic Arts Developer: DICE
Genre: First-Person Shooter Price: £19.99

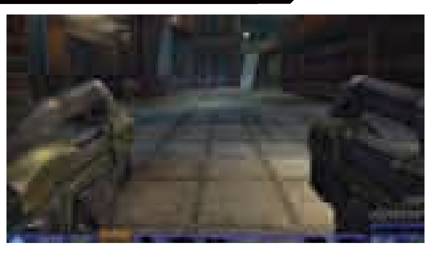


With its focus on classes, vehicles and expansive maps, *Battlefield 2* has paved the way for team-based warfare. The console versions come close, but PC *Battlefield* still stands head and shoulders above the pack. The ultimate online shooter.

ISSUE: **34** SCORE: **9**

7 UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

Publisher: Atari Developer: Digital Extremes
Genre: First-Person Shooter Price: £19.99



Why twiddle your thumbs in anticipation of *Unreal Tournament 2007* when you can play *UT2004*? It's crammed with variety, and features the most frenetic multi-player FPS action on PC. Pure adrenaline in a box.

ISSUE: **18** SCORE: **8**

8 GRIM FANDANGO

Publisher: LucasArts Developer: In-House
Genre: Adventure Price: £9.99

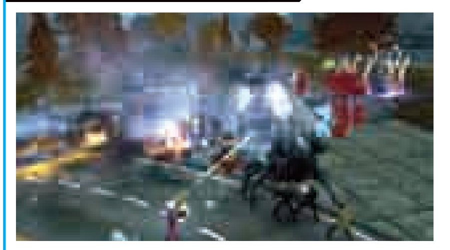


A superbly dark and comic adventure, *Grim Fandango* saw LucasArts make a transition to 3D adventure with the GrimE engine. It was lauded by critics and gamers alike and won numerous awards, but wasn't so successful commercially.

ISSUE: **N/A** SCORE: **8**

9 CITY OF HEROES

Publisher: NCsoft Developer: Cryptic Studios
Genre: MMORPG Price: £19.99

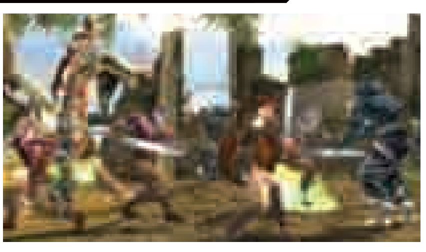


It's worth mentioning for the massive variety in customising the appearance and abilities of your hero alone. Comic aficionados and gamers alike anticipated *City Of Heroes* for its ability to recreate classic comic characters.

ISSUE: **21** SCORE: **8**

10 GUILD WARS

Publisher: NCsoft Developer: AreaNet
Genre: MMORPG Price: £14.99



A game that distinguishes itself from other MMORPGs with its competitive/co-operative online play, rather than pure massively multi-player gaming. *Guild Wars* emphasises team play with guild groups. Plus, there's no subscription fee.

ISSUE: **33** SCORE: **8**

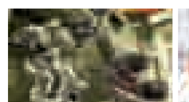
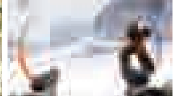
PS2 | PSP | XBOX | XBOX 360 | GAMECUBE | DS | GBA | PC

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-

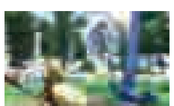
TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

Not as well received as the previous instalment, but still one of the most frenetic and fun multi-player games you're likely to play on any format.

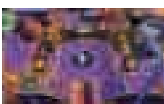
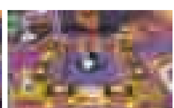
THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Certainly the biggest, and perhaps best RPG of 2006. In terms of sheer value for money, *Oblivion* is well worth the transaction. It has enough gameplay to last you until 2010.

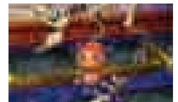
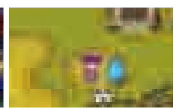
MERCURY

This is what we all wanted the steel ball bearing in *Screwball Scramble* to be: a big blob of a toxic element. This was the biggest innovation in puzzle gaming we'd seen in a while.

ANIMAL CROSSING

It's a kitsch and oddly entertaining title that's spawned a baby for the DS. It's a wonder that *Animal Crossing* ever made it out of Japan, but it suits Western tastes very well.

Title	Publisher	Developer	Issue	Score
Xbox Ten Must-Have Games				
Battlefield 2: Modern Combat	Electronic Arts	DICE	38	8
Burnout 3	Electronic Arts	Criterion	23	10
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	26	9
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	N/A	8
Ninja Gaiden Black	Microsoft	Tecmo	18	8
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	28	9
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	24	8
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	22	8
Street Fighter Anniversary Collection	Capcom	In-House	N/A	8
TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	Electronic Arts	Free Radical	29	8
Xbox 360 Ten Must-Have Games				
Burnout Revenge	Electronic Arts	Criterion	37	9
Call Of Duty 2	Activision	Infinity Ward	39	8
Condemned: Criminal Origins	Sega	Monolith	39	7
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	2K Games	Bethesda	43	9
Fight Night Round 3	Electronic Arts	In-House	43	8
Hitman: Blood Money	Eidos	IO Interactive	45	8
Prey	2K Games	Venom Games	46	8
Project Gotham Racing 3	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	39	9
Quake 4	Activision	Id Software	38	8
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	Ubisoft	In-House	45	9
PlayStation Portable Ten Must-Have Games				
Burnout Legends	Electronic Arts	Criterion	37	9
Football Manager 2006	Sega	In-House	N/A	8
Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories	Rockstar	In-House	39	8
LocoRoco	Sony	In-House	46	9
Lumines	Ubisoft	Q Entertainment	28	8
Mercury	Sony	Awesome Studios	32	8
Metal Gear Ac!d 2	Konami	In-House	44	7
Pursuit Force	Sony	In-House	39	7
Ridge Racer	Sony	Namco	28	8
WipEout Pure	Sony	In-House	31	8
Nintendo GameCube Ten Must-Have Games				
Alien Hominid	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	27	8
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	1	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	N/A	8
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	10	9

ON THE HORIZON

THEY MAY NOT BE HERE JUST YET, BUT WE FEEL THAT

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

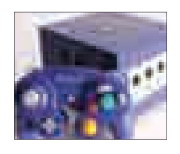
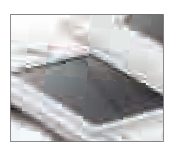
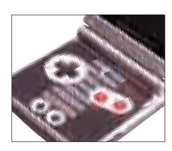
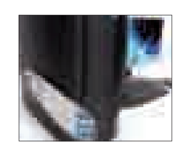
Format: Nintendo Wii Publisher: Nintendo Developer: In-House



Nintendo had everyone jigging with excitement over this Wii launch title at E3. If *Twilight Princess* is anything like *Ocarina Of Time* then it's a dead cert for the Essentials list. We're still salivating at the thought of actually swinging Link's sword for real this time. It's just a Wiimote, you say? Piffle – we know Nintendo is secretly forging its Wii controllers from fragments of the legendary master sword itself.





EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	2	8
killer7	Capcom	In-House	34	9
The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	5	9
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House	2	10
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	29	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	In-House	24	8

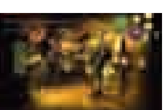
Nintendo DS Ten Must-Have Games				
Animal Crossing: Wild World	Nintendo	In-House	40	8
Daigasso! Band Brothers	Nintendo	In-House	29	8
Kirby: Power Paintbrush	Nintendo	HAL Labs	31	8
Mario Kart DS	Nintendo	In-House	39	7
Meteos	Nintendo	Q Entertainment	31	9
Nintendogs	Nintendo	In-House	37	7
Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan	Nintendo	Inis	37	8
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney	Nintendo	Capcom	23	8
Trauma Center: Under The Knife	Nintendo	Atlus	39	8
Zoo Keeper	Ignition Entertainment	Success	30	8

Nintendo GBA Ten Must-Have Games				
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House	8	9
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House	6	8
The Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	In-House	25	7
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream	14	9
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	22	7
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House	17	8
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House	11	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3 Upper	Ubisoft	Crawfish	1	8
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House	N/A	8
WarioWare: Twisted!	Nintendo	In-House	31	8

PlayStation2 Ten Must-Have Games				
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	8	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	12	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House	30	8
God Of War	Sony	In-House	32	9
Guitar Hero	RedOctane	Harmonix	40	9
Ico	Sony	In-House	N/A	9
Pro Evolution Soccer 5	Konami	In-House	N/A	8
Rez	Sega	Uga	N/A	8
Shadow Of The Colossus	Sony	In-House	39	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	5	8

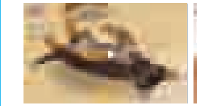
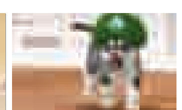
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Nintendo's debut GC *Zelda* is worth buying just to witness how pretty it is cel-shaded. Pre-owned copies are continuously being recycled, which is testament to its popularity.

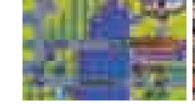
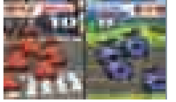
NINTENDOGS

It's that cyber-pet Tamagotchi idea again but wrapped up in a very cute package and given DS voice-command and stylus treatment. These dogs are definitely not just for Christmas.

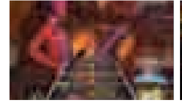
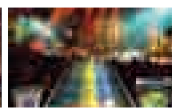
ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

Turn-based warfare with the chess-like strategy of the *Advance Wars* series proves compelling play. Perhaps too simplistic for more powerful consoles, this is a must for GBA.

GUITAR HERO

You have a PS2 but you don't have *Guitar Hero*? And none of your mates have it? And you're not bankrupt? And you're not Jimi Hendrix? What's wrong with you?

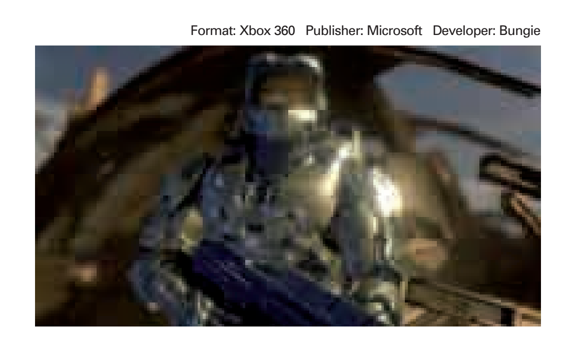



THESE TITLES COULD BE APPEARING IN OUR LISTS IN THE NOT-TOO-DISTANT FUTURE

HALO 3

Format: Xbox 360 Publisher: Microsoft Developer: Bungie

2007 is a long way off and we've barely had any details. But does anyone doubt that Bungie will pull off a masterpiece again? We're certain that, after anticipating *Halo's* next-gen debut for more than two years since the launch of 360, all your mates will have it. So if you haven't bought it two years from now, you won't be able to regale them with your Master Chief escapades, will you?

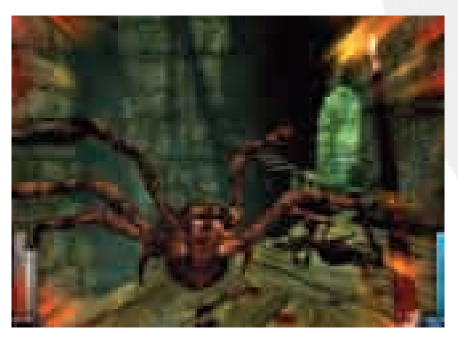


NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™



NEXT MONTH

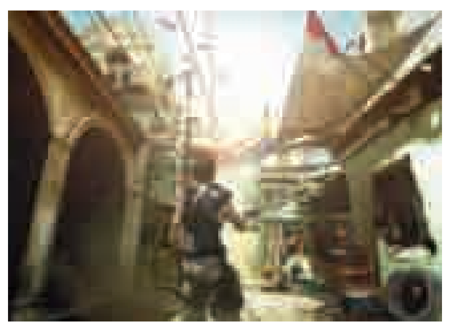
180
PAGES OF MOTION-SENSITIVE GAMING


Like *Oblivion* mixed with a high-octane FPS – *Dark Messiah* is looking jolly nice indeed.

MORE… REVIEWS

PS3's delay has left us with plenty of room to concentrate on all of the big current-gen and 360 games coming up this winter, with *Vice City Stories, Splinter Cell: Double Agent, Dark Messiah Of Might And Magic* and *Crackdown* all finally putting in an appearance. Expect a strong and long review section for our 50th issue.

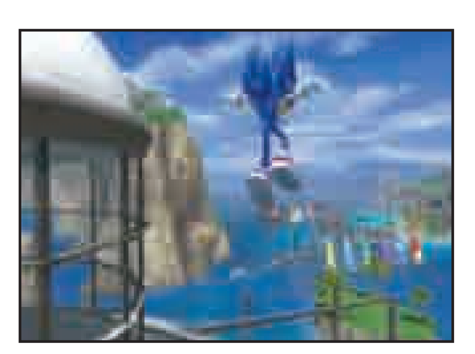
"DARK MESSIAH COULD BE A CONTENDER FOR THE BEST GAME OF 2006"


Words cannot contain our excitement – a life without *Resident Evil 5* is a life not worth living.

MORE… PREVIEWS

We'll be back from Japan and bringing you the low down on all the happenings at this year's Tokyo Game Show next month together with the promise of news on *Resident Evil 5, DMC4* and all manner of Wii and PS3 goodness. Also, expect the usual in-depth looks at all of next year's most exciting titles, be they PC or console.

"TGS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DATE IN THE JAPANESE GAMING CALENDAR"


This little fellow has a lot to answer for – find out what in our platformer explosion next month.

MORE… FEATURES

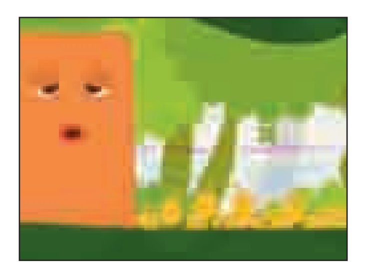
Oh yes, it's Bible time again, and this time **games™** will be leaping headlong into the wonderful world of platform games, and delivering the definitive overview of one of gaming's oldest genres. As if that wasn't enough, we'll also be providing another huge exclusive interview along with all the retro loveliness you're no doubt accustomed to.

ON SALE 02 NOV '06

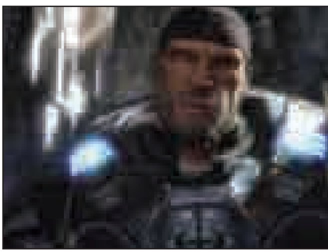
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ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF games™

Enough of what we think – now you get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the game industry. Or not…



LocoRoco stands as a shining example of originality in a sea of licences and rehashes.



If Xbox 360 can support gorgeous graphics like those in *Gears Of War*, does PS3 really offer anything new?

Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Imagine Publishing Ltd, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EZ

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@imagine-publishing.co.uk**

PRE-OWNED GAMES are an easy way for the younger gamer to buy what they otherwise would not be able to afford. Game and similar stores do make a healthy profit from pre-owned games, but publishers have unfounded fears. They need to take a step back and rethink their strategy and pricing policies. The recent trend of £50 for a next-gen game is ludicrous. *Quake IV* on Xbox 360 for £50, or on PC for £14.99? Now, let me think.

I think licences are where the problems lie. Companies spend so much money buying a licence then making a turkey of a game or rehashing an existing one that the public gets bored. It's not the second-hand market that's damaging profits; it's the cheek of asking £50 for a game with only slightly better graphics than last year's version.

Something original like *LocoRoco* can still take the world by storm. Did it cost £3 million for a licence? Companies should invest more in making original games instead of rehashing the same old thing. If companies spent more time and money developing quality, they could sell them for less as more people would buy. This would all but eliminate the pre-owned market, more would be sold, the public would get quality games for less of their hard-earned cash, and everyone would be happy.
Dave Campbell

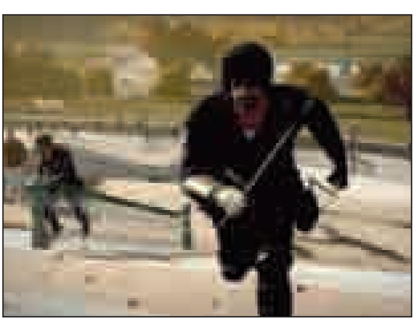
games™: Wow, you really have it all figured out. Something tells us, however, that the reality will be far less simple. PC games are cheaper, but the hardware to run high-end games is far more expensive than a console, and fewer people have access to a decent set-up. Everybody is sick of the miniscule updates of sports and driving franchises, but they will only disappear when the public stops buying them. *LocoRoco* is a fine game, but a misleading example in this context. If it were simply a case of investing money to create a game of such brilliance and originality, then trust us, every publisher would do it. Unfortunately bottling lightning is very difficult, and as long as the videogame industry remains a business, the moneymen will tend toward easy profits. We have a responsibility as consumers to fight against mediocrity and greed. If it doesn't sell, it doesn't get made – it's simple supply and demand.

I'M HERE TO notify you that your Teach Yourself Japanese section is hugely misleading. It is printed, I presume, without being proof read. The Japanese is, in some cases, downright wrong. In popular Japanese culture it's the fad to mangle your language to the point that other generations can't comprehend you, but to a serious student of Japanese your 'lessons' can be confusing.
Yuka Mizuno

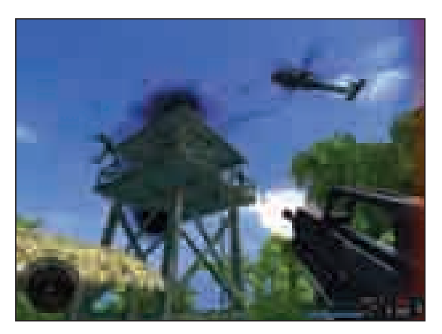
games™: We'd like to reassure all 'serious' students of Japanese that the Teach Yourself Japanese section is intended as light-hearted humour, and not an educationally valid path toward fluent Japanese. If it were, we'd probably teach you how to ask for directions or how to find the train station, rather than nonsense like, "Inside the treasure box was a magical herb". We would strongly urge anyone out there 'learning' Japanese from the pages of **games™** to stop at once and enrol

"COMPANIES SPEND **SO MUCH MONEY** BUYING A **LICENCE** AND **MAKING A TURKEY OF A GAME** THAT THE **PUBLIC GETS BORED**. IT'S NOT THE **SECOND-HAND MARKET** THAT DAMAGES PROFITS; IT'S **THE CHEEK OF ASKING £50** A GAME"





The Outsider is another game claiming to be the bridge between cinema and videogames.



Could *Far Cry* prove to be Uwe Boll's most triumphant adaptation? The competition is far from stiff.

on a serious course. Oh, and get themselves a sense of humour while they're at it.

DAVID BRABEN – WORKING on *The Outsider* – appears to be the latest game designer hailed by critics as 'able to bridge the gap between games and cinema'. I'm inclined to believe that he will probably fail. The cinematic elements of games like *Fahrenheit* boiled down to pressing buttons in the correct order: a task that could become infuriating and serve to distance the player from the action. The plot, in its simplest element, was also awful.

I realise that there are instances of games 'borrowing' from cinema, that are actually quite enjoyable, and there are financial incentives for game companies in movie licences. Braben argues that when games have used the influence of cinema it has been the cinema of Hong Kong and martial arts, where there is little emphasis on plot. But why is this a problem? Isn't this what suits games best? Gamers don't want to endure a long cut-scene explaining why their character is so conflicted. Will Wright has made the point 'Why do games need plot?' They don't. I would have just as much fun playing *LocoRoco* without the backstory.

Even what appears to be the last bastion of innovative programming, the Wii, has been compromised by the announcement of *Sadness*. Games have tried to become a more 'valid' form of entertainment, and have borrowed from film to do so. Those games have now been criticised for borrowing from action cinema, so *Sadness* decides to borrow elements from German expressionism. What's next, 'Battleship Potemkin: The Game'?
Tom

games™: In our opinion, it could go either way. On the one hand, increased processing power and graphical ability will leave next-gen developers sorely tempted to make their games more like movies – it is the obvious use of the power, and a damn sight easier than genuine innovation. On the other, there is every chance that the next generation will provide the chance for games to become comparable to movies in a more favourable way. Current consoles don't quite have the clout to pull it off; the new ones might.

Although *Sadness* is clearly taking cinema as its influence, we feel that this is a step in the right direction. The vast majority of videogames use action cinema as a yardstick already, and we really don't need any more. If Nibris is successful it will inspire other developers to move away from the John Woo/*The Matrix*/John Carpenter sphere of influence and could enrich and deepen the medium. We're not saying 'Battleship Potemkin: The Game' is a good idea, but any

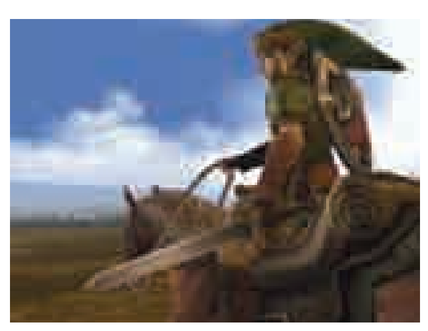
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Nibris is taking influence from a more obscure form of cinema with *Sadness*: German expressionism.



Zelda's new horse looks fairly realistic from where we're sitting, though some would disagree.

game that is struggling to be different should always be supported.

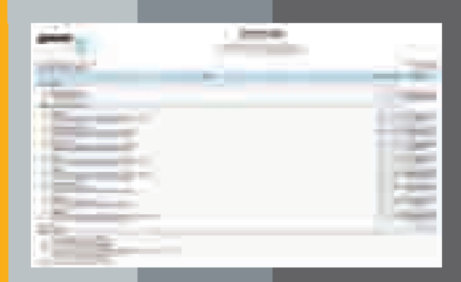
I JUST WATCHED footage of *Zelda* and got a little bit worried. Nothing major, it's just that I recently finished *Shadow Of The Colossus*, and I've never seen such good animation for a horse. I'm looking forward to playing the new *Zelda* game, but the horse animation is not as good. It's no big deal, but it's a big step down for anyone who has ridden the horse in *SOTC*.
Ben Brook

games™: We feel your pain, Ben. The most striking thing about the new *Zelda* game really is the horse animation. What a let down.

I WOULD LIKE to congratulate you on your interview with the infamous Uwe Boll. As we all know, game-to-movie history is a sorry affair: *Super Mario* – awful; *Doom* – barely better; *Street Fighter* – let's not go there. Anyway, you have to admit that Uwe's enthusiasm for his projects is truly inspiring, and maybe he will finally reach the Holy 'game-movie' Grail. Obviously someone out there thinks so or he simply wouldn't get his hands on the projects. Good luck to him on *Postal* and *Far Cry* and whatever other script falls into his lap.
Ade Smith

games™: We agree. It isn't like Boll is sullying the 'good' name of videogame movies – they've ALL been pretty much terrible. Perhaps there is the fear among gamers that Boll's films highlight that their beloved medium is simply too shallow to ever make a truly great film – even the dense plot of *Silent Hill* made for a feather-light cinematic experience. Cut-scenes are almost constantly abused as unnecessary and contrived, and yet gamers seem all too interested in watching what is ostensibly a 90-minute cut-scene. If Boll's films seem like a game without all the fun, interactive stuff, it's probably because they are.

"GAMES HAVE NOW BEEN **CRITICISED FOR BORROWING** FROM **ACTION CINEMA**, SO **SADNESS** DECIDES TO BORROW ELEMENTS FROM **GERMAN EXPRESSIONISM.** WHAT'S NEXT, **'BATTLESHIP POTEMKIN: THE GAME'**?"



For all your games™ forum needs, point your browsers to… www.gamestm.co.uk/forum

FROM THE FORUM

THE SECOND-HAND GAMING DEBATE

Yoshi^
I have a range of opinions on this. Personally, I love second-hand games: I have a very limited budget, and if everything was like it was back in the Nineties when you had to pay out £40 for every game you bought, I probably wouldn't bother playing videogames any more. However, if a game comes out that I really love, say, *Zelda, Okami, God Of War* and the like, I will make an effort to buy the game new because I want the developers to receive the money.

Alistair_Thomas
I usually buy first-hand, unless I cannot find a particular game I am after. I'd like to see the second-hand market stick around. It is always nice to pop into a game shop, looking for a new release, and walking out with an old gem you haven't played since you were ten.

Killerclaw
Do you pay a fee to the car dealer when you sell your old car? Contact the builder when you sell your house? No.

AC-AA-1806
Without pre-owned I wouldn't have played nearly as many great games as I have done. I think the market should stick around, but the developers/publishers should get a share of the profits made from each game. That said, it may well make the prices rocket to only a couple of quid cheaper than if you bought it brand new.

Catdonkey
Of course, if the publishers sold new games at a reasonable retail price, say £25 a pop, then there wouldn't be such a problem since more people would buy new. I haven't bought a full-priced game for years and I doubt that I ever will. If they wise up and stop being so greedy then the second-hand 'problem' will simply go away.

Noize
Why should this industry, among others, live by special rules that no other has to? This idea goes against the basic principle of a capitalist society. In a capitalist society, competition should be encouraged. The problem nowadays is that big companies all want to get rid of the competition, and thus, not follow the basic rules of capitalism. The industry is saying that it loses money on games people buy used. How come? You have to ASSUME that the buyer would have bought it new otherwise, which is not always the case. If someone doesn't have the money to buy a game at full price, but has enough for a used copy, how come the company is losing money since that person wouldn't have bought it at full price anyway? There isn't any potential loss if there isn't any intention to buy in the first place.


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